SOMEBODY SINGS: BRECHTIAN EPIC DEVICES IN THE PLAYS OF CARYL CHURCHILL

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ABSTRACT

While in recent years Caryl Churchill's drama has engendered substantial critical inquiry, there has been no sustained or comprehensive examination of her work in the context of one of this century's most influential dramatic forms, what has been known as Brechtian epic theatre. Epic theatre's counter-discursive, counter-hegemonic elements have appealed to a new generation of women playwrights, among them Caryl Churchill, who finds its politics invaluable to her socialist feminist dramaturgy. A detailed exploration and analysis of several of Churchill's explicitly socialist feminist plays, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1978), *Top Girls* (1982), *Fen* (1983), and *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), enable us to determine the extent to which her plays can usefully be considered within the context of Brechtian epic theatre and to understand Churchill's unique application of epic techniques to a politic that moves beyond class concerns to incorporate concerns of gender, race, sexual orientation, and age.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation will address subjectivity, power, and discourse in an attempt to demonstrate how Churchill's plays, like all literary texts, construct meaning and subject positions for the reader and for the audience. This dissertation privileges socialist and/or feminist theories that stress the social construction of subjectivity and recognize the need for historical specificity. Such a critical methodology not only clarifies how Churchill's epic drama, with its strong socialist

feminist politic, constructs fictive representations of women and men that contest norms of patriarchal gender relations and the implicit hierarchies of value at work within them, but also reveals how Churchill moves beyond Brecht to present complex female and male characters whose subjectivities are constructed in the experience of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and age.

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I also thank my children, Urbain, Jordan, and Melissa , and my husband, Edwin, for the emotional and spiritual support that has made this dissertation possible. I hope I have justified your faith in me.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Edwin Peter Morelli, whose love and support have always been there for me. Please accept this as a small token of my love and esteem.

And, to my mother, Blanche Marie Letendre. Although Alzheimer's Disease has blurred your memory of us, know that you will live on in the fondest memories of your children and grandchildren for years to come.

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INTRODUCTION

I've constantly said that I'm both a socialist and a feminist.[1] (Caryl Churchill)

Caryl Churchill, appropriating the apparently previously male-centered epic form, constructs plays in which she represents both women and men as multiple, de-centered, and internally contradictory subjects constructed in the experience of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and age. While in recent years Churchill's drama has engendered substantial critical inquiry, there has been no sustained or comprehensive examination of her work in the context of one of this century's most influential dramatic forms, that known as Brechtian epic theatre. Amelia Howe Kritzer, in *The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Theatre of Empowerment* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), does explore Churchill and Brecht's common artistic intent, "to empower audiences against oppression rather than encourage serene acceptance of an apparently inevitable fate" (3), but she does not make this commonality the main focus of her inquiry. In Phyliss R. Randall's *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook* (New York & London: Garland, 1988), a compilation of nine critical essays on Churchill's work, only Elin Diamond's "Closing no Gaps: Aphra Behn, Caryl Churchill, and Empire" makes reference to Brecht. Similarly, only three journal articles acknowledge the Brechtian influence in Churchill's work: Janelle Reinelt's "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama"; Michael

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[1]From an interview with Linda Fitzsimmons published in *File on Churchill* (London: Methuen, 1989): 89.

Swanson's "Mother/Daughter Relationships in the Plays of Caryl Churchill"; and Elin Diamond's "(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre." Of these, only Diamond's article makes the Brechtian influence central to its analysis. A detailed exploration and analysis of several of Churchill's explicitly socialist feminist plays, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1978), *Top Girls* (1982), *Fen* (1983), and *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), will enable us to determine the extent to which her plays can usefully be considered within the context of Brechtian epic theatre.

In order to understand Churchill's socialist feminist appropriation of epic drama, we must recognize and acknowledge that dramatic form's male-centered genesis and development. When we trace the historical and contemporary roots of epic drama, we discover that epic theatre incorporates, transforms, and expands upon some of the classical dramatic concepts of Aristotle and the modern dramatic concepts of Erwin Piscator. However, a closer examination also reveals the important, though largely overlooked, role of women in the creation of epic theatre. The vital contribution to epic theatre of such women as Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, Ruth Berlau, and Hella Wuolijoki suggests that the theoretical underpinnings of epic theatre have made it attractive to women almost from its inception early in the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, its counter-discursive, counter-hegemonic[2] elements have also appealed to

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[2]My use of the terms counter-discursive and counter-hegemonic is informed by Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, in which he uses the term hegemony to describe the form of political power based on the consent of subordinate classes. According to Gramsci, the domination of one class over others is not merely the result of coercion, but rather is based on one class's ability to satisfy certain objective needs of a society and to elaborate models of exemplary behavior. Gramsci argues that the hegemony of a dominant class is founded on an organic system of social alliances held together by a common ideology and a common culture. For a detailed account of Gramsci's theories see *The Gramsci Reader:Selected Writings* (London: Lawrence and

a new generation of women playwrights, among them Caryl Churchill, who find its politics invaluable to their feminist dramaturgy.[3] However, although Hauptmann, Steffin, Barlau, and Wuolijoki contributed significantly to Brecht's drama and dramatic practice, there is no evidence that they drafted or wrote parts of his theoretical corpus. Similarly, although Piscator did articulate some epic drama theory, primarily in his *Das Politische Theater* (1963), his theorizing was not nearly as extensive or as focused as Brecht's. Indeed, epic theatre received the nomenclature of *Brechtian* epic theatre largely because Brecht provided the most extensive theorizing of epic theatre.[4] Consequently, I have grounded my study of Churchill's work in Brechtian epic devices and methods rather than those of Piscator or the women.

A critique of Churchill's drama within the context of Brechtian epic theatre, then, represents a useful paradigm in which to read and to view her vast body of work. The theoretical framework of this dissertation will address subjectivity, power, and discourse in an attempt to demonstrate how Churchill's plays, like all literary texts,

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Wishart, 1988).

[3]For feminist playwrights, Brechtian epic techniques offer a methodology for interrogating the material conditions of gender behaviour within the wider socio-political context. Because Brechtian epic theatre insists upon the link between bourgeois ideology and conventional modes of dramatic representation, many British women playwrights besides Churchill have used and continue to use epic techniques in their feminist drama. See, for example, Jane Arden's *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven* (1969); Sarah Daniels' *Masterpieces* (1983) and *Beside Herself* (1990); Maureen Duffy's *Rites* (1969); Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (1958) and *The Knack* (1961); and Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice* (1984).

[4]Throughout this dissertation, I use *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964), John Willett's translation of Brecht's theoretical essays. It should be noted, however, that the dates provided are somewhat problematic in that several of Brecht's essays were published posthumously and consequently the dates provided are sometimes an informed estimate.

construct meaning and subject positions for the reader and for the audience. As the epigraph to this chapter testifies, Churchill has declared simultaneous allegiance to socialist and feminist principles and this dissertation thus privileges socialist and/or feminist theories. However, because her dramatic practice also shows her understanding of the interrelatedness of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, and age, an exploration of Churchill's epic drama, with its strong socialist feminist politic, clarifies how she constructs fictive representations of women and men that contest norms of patriarchal gender relations and the implicit hierarchies of value at work within them.

Each of the plays discussed in this dissertation is examined within the context of one particular socialist and/or feminist theoretical framework. *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, for example, examined in the context of Walter Benjamin's Marxist *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, can be seen to address gender from the perspective of a historical materialist critical practice which explores the side of history unwritten in the history books. Although *Vinegar Tom*, like *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, offers a historical explanation of repressive power, it can be even more richly understood in the context of what Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls *revisionary mythopoesis*, the feminist re-visioning of classical myths and other culturally resonant material. Similarly, Joan W. Scott's feminist article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" goes a long way in explaining how Churchill uses the concept of gender as an analytic category in her writing of women back into history in *Top Girls*. Michel Foucault's socialist text, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One, An Introduction*, is extremely useful in understanding Churchill's exploration in *Cloud Nine* of how

discourses of sexuality constitute and govern individuals as sexual subjects, and of how social power relations are produced and sustained in the discursive production of historically specific sexualities. Correspondingly, Louis Althusser's socialist theory of *interpellation*, as discussed in "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," helps clarify how *Fen* becomes a powerful site of resistance and redefinition of dominant discourses that construct gendered subjectivity. And finally, Elizabeth Grosz's "A Note on Essentialism and Difference," the conclusion to *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, provides valuable insight into how Churchill and Lan use feminism of difference in *A Mouthful of Birds* to counterbalance the male monopoly on the production of knowledge and to respond to the political goals of feminist struggles. However, the theoretical frameworks can not only be usefully applied to individual plays. Althusser's theory of interpellation, for example, given prominence in the chapter on *Fen*, is also useful to explain how in *Vinegar Tom* some of the alleged witches come to accept their naming as witches.

While these various socialist and/or feminist theoretical frameworks help explain how Churchill uses drama as a vehicle for social change, her consistent staging of a socialist feminist message through the medium of Brechtian epic theatre makes it a basic paradigm within which to read her work. A close exploration and analysis of these plays, then, make it possible to discover the extent to which Churchill's plays can be considered within the context of Brechtian epic drama and to understand Churchill's unique application of Brechtian epic techniques to a politic that moves beyond class concerns to incorporate issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, and age.

CHAPTER ONE

That which exists shall belong to those who can make it flourish.

(*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*)

In order to understand how Caryl Churchill's drama relates to the epic theatre tradition, an examination of the genesis and development of Brechtian epic theatre must precede the analyses of specific Churchill plays. An exploration of the Aristotelian and Piscatorian influence on epic theatre helps make explicit that drama's male-centeredness. However, the important, though largely overlooked, role of women in the creation of epic theatre demonstrates that its counter-discursive, counter-hegemonic theoretical underpinnings have made it attractive to women playwrights almost from its inception. Tracing the development of epic theatre not only reveals its conventions and characteristics, but also makes possible a discovery of the extent to which Churchill's plays can appropriately be considered within this context.

In Bertolt Brecht's well-known essay "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" (1957) in *Brecht on Theatre*, the German playwright acknowledges his indebtedness to Aristotle for the "definition [of] the difference between the dramatic and epic forms [which] was attributed to their different methods of construction, whose laws were dealt with by two different branches of aesthetics" (70). Nowhere is Aristotle's influence on Brecht more evident than in the latter's use of the categories Aristotelian drama [drama in which "the plot leads the hero into situations where he reveals his

innermost being" (78)] and non-Aristotelian drama ["referring . . . to the elimination of empathy and imitation (or mimesis)" (47)]. Indeed, even today, Aristotle's terms and standards continue to influence the way in which literary and dramatic productions are judged. William E. Gruber makes explicit Aristotle's ongoing influence, and Brecht's importance, when he asserts: "Before Brecht, . . . the term "Aristotelian" [drama] had no contrary" (200).

Aristotle's dramatic concepts were formulated in *The Poetics*, a document written in approximately 330 BC. No definitive Greek text of the *Poetics* exists, but three manuscripts form the basis of all later editions.[1] The earliest and most authoritative of these, Paris 1741, is from the eleventh century and can be found at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The other two are Riccardianus 46, from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and an Arabic translation made in the tenth century which goes back through a Syriac intermediary to a Greek manuscript of before the seventh century. Most authorities agree that the *Poetics* originally consisted of two books, the second of which was devoted to iambic poetry, comedy, and possibly *katharsis*. After Aristotle's death, Book II disappeared and corruptions began to be introduced into the fragment of the text that survived.[2] In this fragmentary text, which discusses dramatic literature, Aristotle defines tragedy as follows:

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[1]In this dissertation, I use S.H. Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art with a critical text and translation of The Poetics* (London, 1911) because it, along with Ingram Bywater's *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, is considered by many scholars of Aristotle to be the most reliable introduction to *The Poetics* available in English.

[2]In Leon Golden's translation of *Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), O.B. Hardison, Jr. provides useful historical context for *The Poetics*. See particularly his section entitled "Introduction: Bases of Interpretation," 55-62.

> Tragedy . . . is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (23)

Aristotle emphasizes action as a constituent element of tragedy, suggesting not only that it is an action which is being imitated, but that the imitation takes the form of action as well. He suggests that drama "is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality" (27). Not surprisingly, Aristotle gives prominence to plot which he defines as "the arrangement of the incidents" (25), and he identifies two of its key elements as "Reversal and Recognition" (39). He suggests that "the incidents and the plot are the end of tragedy. . . [and that] without action there cannot be a tragedy" (27). He also insists that there must be a "Unity of plot" (33), and that the plot must be presented in a linear progression.[3] Indeed, Aristotle's discussion about disjointed dramatic structures anticipates twentieth-century epic theatre's episodic structure: "Of all plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot 'episodic' in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without

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[3]Although critics continually refer to Aristotle's Three Unities, 'Unity of Action' (Plot), 'Unity of Time' and 'Unity of Place,' *The Poetics* itself contains only one brief passage referring to the 'Unity of Time': "[Epic poetry and Tragedy] differ, again, in their length: for Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly exceed this limit; whereas the Epic action has no limits of time"(22-23). In addition, *The Poetics* contains no reference at all to 'Unity of Place.' S.H. Butcher, in a footnote to his text, demonstrates that the "formal recognition of the *Unity of Place* as a third Unity dates from Castelvetro's first edition of *The Poetics* in 1570" (291).

probable or necessary sequence" (37-9). Obviously, in terms of "Unity of plot," Aristotle's dramatic aesthetics stand in direct opposition to much contemporary dramaturgy.

Unlike much modern drama, which emphasizes character, in Aristotelian drama "character comes in as a subsidiary to the action" (27). This is not to suggest, however, that Aristotle devalues character, which he defines as "that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents" (25). He asserts that character, and thought which he defines as "the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances" (29), together represent "the two natural causes from which actions spring"(25). Indeed, the prominence Aristotle accords character becomes obvious when, in his listing the six parts of every tragedy in order of importance, he concedes second place to character. John Gassner, in "Aristotelian Literary Criticism," his introduction to S.H. Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, suggests that the minimal character development in Greek tragedies, rather than resulting from any devaluation of character, is purely structural:

> Aristotle . . . does not think of action without characters--characters so fully realized, indeed, that he pays special attention to their dispositions, or *ethos*, and their intellectual content, or *dianoia*. It is because Aristotle kept his mind on the nature of drama as the medium in which things are represented rather than narrated, and surely not because he was less interested in man than we are, that he gave priority to action. If he refrained from painting a nimbus around character as an element in drama, we may be certain that he took it for granted that tragedy's sole

consideration was man and his destiny. (142)

Clearly then, Aristotle strategically gives priority to the element of action in order to iterate the human-centered point of view of *The Poetics* as a whole and of his view of tragedy in particular.

That Aristotle places humanity at the center of his *Poetics* becomes obvious early in his text when he suggests that "the instinct for imitation is implanted in man from childhood," and that "Universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated" (15). By viewing drama in terms of its effect, the pleasure it bestows, Aristotle gives precedence to human values. By stressing the pleasure-giving feature of drama, Aristotle separates aesthetic theory from moral theory. He consistently emphasizes that the end of drama is pleasure and that the dramatist who fails to produce pleasure fails in the specific function of art.

The second element of tragedy identified by Aristotle as "language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play" (23) would likely have generated a great deal of critical controversy had not Aristotle made his meaning explicit. In the same paragraph in which he defines tragedy, Aristotle declares, "By 'language embellished,' I mean language into which rhythm, 'harmony,' and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts,' I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song" (23). Clearly Aristotle means to distinguish between choral orders which were sung and danced and non choral orders. Of the embellishments, Aristotle suggests that song holds the chief place; succeeded by diction, "the mere metrical arrangement of the words" (25); and finally by spectacle, which is "of all the parts, . . . the least artistic . . .

depend[ing] more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet" (29-31). Aristotle implies that drama's tragic effect lies almost entirely within the verbal text, and by extension, that the spectator's response can be determined on the basis of that text. As Aristotle argues, "the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors" (29). Spectacle is the least important of the elements of drama because dramatists who know their craft should be able to initiate the emotional involvement of the audience solely through the structure of the play itself.

Katharsis, another element of drama identified by Aristotle, continues to excite much critical debate. Indeed, as S.H. Butcher argues, "No passage, probably, in ancient literature has been so frequently handled by commentators, critics, and poets, by men who knew Greek, and by men who knew no Greek" (243). Some of the critics Butcher cites include John Milton, Jacob Bernays, H. Weil, Corneille, Racine, Lessing, and Goethe. Butcher explicates how "the three chief meanings of [*katharsis*], (1) the medical, (2) the religious or liturgical . . . and (3) the moral" (245) appear in some form or other in all the various critiques. Aristotle argues that drama effects a *katharsis*, variously translated as purification, purgation, and/or clarification, of "pity and fear" by exciting those very emotions within the spectators. Although in real life, pity and fear can be disturbing, when they are evoked through tragedy they can have a therapeutic effect. As the tragic action progresses, pity and fear are first roused, then transmuted into higher forms. The spectators undergo what Butcher calls a "clarifying process," wherein pity and fear become universalised emotions:

> What is purely personal and self-regarding drops away. The spectator who is brought face to face with grander sufferings than his own

> experiences a sympathetic ecstasy, or lifting out of himself. It is precisely in this transport of feeling, which carries a man beyond his individual self, that the distinctive tragic pleasure resides. (267)

Clearly then, just as he sees universal pleasure in imitation, Aristotle also sees tragedy as representational of the universality of the human condition. Contrasting poetry to history, he asserts that "it is this universality at which poetry aims" (35), thereby demonstrating his allegiance to the human-centered point of view inherent in *katharsis*.

Although committed to the idea that purgation, purification, and clarification occur through pity and fear, Aristotle suggests that *katharsis* depends upon a kind of aesthetic distancing. He implies that spectators achieve *katharsis* by being able to stand at some remove from the action: "Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and dead bodies" (15). Spectators distanced from painful experiences such as death are better able to experience release from tensions. It seems clear then that while Aristotelian drama appeals to the emotions, specifically pity and fear, it does not appeal *only* to emotions. Aristotelian dramatic aesthetics understand the element of *katharsis* as a blend of emotional involvement with aesthetic detachment, of pity and fear with a degree of objectivity.

Given the comprehensiveness of Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is hardly surprising that his dramatic aesthetics continue as a standard of judgement even up to the present. His emphasis on action which involves the spectators and provides for emotional *katharsis* still holds much currency today. Similarly, his insistence on unity of plot and his identification of Recognition and Reversal as two of plot's key elements continue to

influence many twentieth-century playwrights. Indeed, the producers of epic theatre themselves could not have formulated their dramatic theory without Aristotle's *Poetics* as a guide to follow and against which to react.

In Aristotelian terms, however, the phrase 'epic theatre' would be an oxymoronic formulation. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle contrasts tragedy with epic poetry. Just as he identifies action as the main characteristic of tragedy, he identifies narration as the key feature of epic literature, and he asserts that ". . . in Epic poetry, owing to the narrative form, many events simultaneously transacted can be presented; and these . . . add mass and dignity to the poem" (93). In his discussion of how "Epic poetry differs from Tragedy" (91), Aristotle both delineates epic poetry as a mode of literature distinct from the dramatic forms of tragedy and comedy, and defines epic as a narrative poem large in effect, characters, events, and settings. The word *epic* itself, from the Greek root *epos*, originally meant speech, word, or song, a fact which reflects its narrative genesis as an outgrowth of traditional story-telling. Although in common parlance epic has come to signify a large-scale, panoramic celebration of the adventure and exploits of heroes and their followers, the epic form abounds in conventional features. In structure, the epic poem is presented in uniform lines, not broken into stanzas, and its diction is rich in static epithets, circumlocutions, and recurrent formulas.[4] Not surprisingly, speeches often occupy a considerable portion of the poem, with the action often presented by a narrator, such as Odysseus at the Phoenician court. And finally, epic action usually occurs in the past. Indeed, as Walter Benjamin suggests, "Any examination of a given

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[4]I found *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford, 1991) particularly useful for my formulation of this definition and description of epic poetry.

epic form is concerned with the relationship of this form to historiography. In fact, one may go even further and raise the question whether historiography does not constitute the common ground of all forms of epic" (95).

This last characteristic of epic, historicization, goes a long way to explain what Marcia Landy, in "The Silent Woman: Towards a Feminist Critique," calls "the historical exclusion of women from great affairs and high art as well as the nature of the linguistic power which has created, perpetuated and reinforced this situation" (18). Connecting the patriarchal omission of women's contribution to history and art, Landy suggests that the epic form, as the form most dependent on history, has been inaccessible to women writers because of "the persistent exclusion of women from historical events, . . . their limited education, . . . their general socialization, . . . [and] their internalization of restricting views of their creative potential" (21). And indeed, this exclusion of women continued well into the twentieth century, as the absence of known women dramatists in the first half of the century can attest. Not surprisingly then, epic theatre, an amalgamation of the dramatic and epic forms, originally emerged as an exclusively male preserve.

Although Bertolt Brecht has long been considered the founder of epic theatre, in terms of chronology Erwin Piscator is more deserving of that title.[5] Indeed, Brecht

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[5]At least a decade before either Piscator or Brecht were involved in theatre, Vsevolod Meyerhold and other Russian dramatists were engaged in dramatic theory and practices that anticipated epic theatre in almost every particular, including cool acting, pattern of movement (gestus), and political engagement. Although there is no indication that either Piscator or Brecht intentionally emulated Russian drama initially, both German dramatists did become familiar over time with its aesthetics and politics. In 1923, Brecht met Soviet actress and director Asja Lazis who introduced him to the techniques of the Soviet revolutionary theatre of Meyerhold and others. In addition, Brecht, and indeed much of Germany's theatrical avant-garde, visited Russia after

himself acknowledges Piscator's contribution to epic theatre and recognizes him as the creator of epic theatre's primary function, its didacticism. In his "On Experimental Theatre," (1959) Brecht says of Piscator's early stage experiments. "[They] broke nearly all the conventions. They intervened to transform the playwright's creative methods, the actors' style of representation, and the work of the stage designer. *They were striving towards an entirely new social function for theatre*" (131). Indeed, although it is under Brecht's name, and as a result of his extensive critical writings, that epic theatre received its renown, the fact remains that almost all the elements of epic theatre can be at least equally credited to Erwin Piscator. Not surprisingly, as John Fuegi reports in *Brecht and Company*, Piscator could not but feel a certain life-long resentment against Brecht: "When Piscator heard the news [of Brecht's death] in West Berlin, his main feeling was anger as he felt he had been robbed by Brecht. In a note to himself about Brecht and the whole idea of "epic theatre," he said bitterly and surely correctly, 'He stole my legacy'" (606). A close examination of Piscator's theatrical theory, practice, and politics bears out the validity of his sense of being generally under-valued, even if not by Brecht himself.

Erwin Piscator was born in Ulm, a small German village in Wetzlar, on December 17, 1895. At the age of eighteen he went to Munich to work on stage as an unpaid actor at the Court Theatre. Two years later, in 1915, Piscator was drafted and

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Hitler's coming to power in 1933. Brecht's closest personal friend in Russia, Sergei Tretiakov, was one of Meyerhold's closest associates. Erwin Piscator went to the Soviet Union to make a film based on Anna Seghers' novel *The Revolt of the Fishermen of St. Barbara* in 1931, and he stayed there until 1936. For a more full account of Russian political theatre see *Meyerhold on Theatre* (New York, 1969). In addition, John Fuegi's *Brecht Heute/Brecht Today* (Athenaum, 1972) offers an interesting article entitled "The Soviet Union and Brecht: The Exile's Choice."

sent to the front, where his three years of active military service resulted in his disillusionment with the ruling classes who were running the war, and his subsequent conversion to Communism. In his *Das Politische Theater*[6] (1963), translated by Hugh Rorrison as *The Political Theatre*, Piscator details his perception of the major effect of World War One:

> [It] finally buried bourgeois individualism under a hail of steel and a holocaust of fire. Man, the individual, existing as an isolated being, independent (at least seemingly) of social connections, revolving egocentrically around the concept of the self, in fact lies buried beneath a marble slab inscribed "The Unknown Soldier." Or, as Remarque formulated it, "The generation of 1914 perished in the war, even if some did survive the shellfire." What came back had nothing more in common with concepts like man, mankind, and humanity, which had symbolized the eternal nature of the God-given order in the parlors of prewar days. (186)

Piscator incorporated his newly discovered awareness about the necessity for the elimination of individualism in favor of collectivity into a politically engaged, socially conscious theory of drama. Of course, it is important to note that although Piscator's theory problematizes some forms of human relationships, it tends to repeat and present as natural the roles and status of women in Western patriarchy. Piscator's obliviousness to gender inequities cannot but undermine his concept of social justice. Still, by moving

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[6]Throughout his text, Piscator uses the terms 'political theatre' and 'epic theatre' interchangeably. Perhaps because his primary focus is on the establishment of politically engaged art, however, he tends to give precedence to the former term.

away from the ancients such as Aristotle who "focused on [man's] relationship to the Fates" (187). Piscator suggests that "man presented on the stage is significant as a social function. . . . Wherever he appears, his class or social stratum appears with him. His moral, spiritual or sexual conflicts are conflicts with society" (187). Recognizing the impossibility of classless individuals in a class-stratified society, Piscator suggests using the stage as a vehicle for social change. He sees politically engaged theatre as a means whereby spectators can be taught to recognize the relationship between social class and social conflicts. In essence, Piscator advocates revolutionary theatre--that is, using theatre as an element of revolutionary change.

In 1919 Piscator went to Konigsberg (now Kalingrad), Germany and co-founded his first, albeit short-lived, politically oriented theatre called the Tribunal. Because of lack of capital, the Tribunal was forced to close and Piscator returned to Berlin. On October 14, 1920, the third anniversary of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union, Piscator and Herman Schuller (1893-1948), in an attempt to end the monopoly of the arts by the bourgeoisie, opened the Proletarisches Theater. From its inception, the Proletarisches Theater functioned as an agitprop theatre whose main goal was to foster class consciousness and proletarian solidarity. Indeed, as Piscator makes explicit, the Proletarisches Theater had only two fundamental principles:

> The first relates to the fact that as an organization it must break with capitalist tradition and create a footing of equality, a common interest and a collective will to work, uniting directors, actors, designers and technical administrative personnel, and then uniting these people

> with the consumers (that is, the audience). . . . [T]he first task facing the Proletarisches Theater is to spread and deepen the understanding of the Communist idea and this cannot be restricted to the activities of one professional group but must become the concern of a wider community in which the public has just as important a function as the stage. (46)

Clearly, for Piscator the function of drama is no longer its enjoyment- or pleasure-giving feature, but rather its didacticism, its ability to inform or instruct the audience, particularly in terms of Communist ideology. Piscator insists on inclusiveness, on breaking down the barriers between performers and the audience:

> The second task facing the Proletarisches Theater is to make an educative, propagandistic impact on those members of the masses who are as yet politically undecided or indifferent, or who have not yet understood that a proletarian state cannot adopt bourgeois art and the bourgeois mode of "enjoying" art. (46)

In Piscator's view, the spectator's role changes from that of passive viewer to that of active participant in the action. This participation, of course, consists in political enlightenment, in the audience's intellectualization of the connections between the immediate situation presented on stage and the wider network of social causes. Political enlightenment in turn results in the audience's awareness that the situation needs improvement or change, and consequently in their transformation from indifference to commitment. For Piscator, then, epic drama's 'Theatre for Instruction' replaces

Aristotelian 'Theatre for Pleasure' as the audience and the stage crew unite in the "political activity" (45) of a theatrical performance.

In talking about drama as a 'political activity,' Piscator lays bare several strategies Brecht will later appropriate and amplify. Piscator views the text as only one of many elements in a process, and an unstable element at that: "It will not always be necessary to give priority to the message the author intended" (45). When the drama company and the audience are politically engaged, any play, even bourgeois plays, can be made "to strengthen the notion of the class struggle and to add to our revolutionary understanding of its historical necessity" (45). According to Piscator, the adaptation of these plays can be accomplished in three ways: by altering the written text because, as Piscator parenthetically asserts, "the conservative personality cult of the artist need not concern us" (45); by preceding the play with an introductory lecture; or by adding a prologue or epilogue to make the meaning explicit. Both Piscator and Brecht will repeatedly use one or more of these tactics in almost all their epic plays. The latter two tactics will obviously result in an emphasis on narration rather than on action. That Piscator promotes a narrative style of drama becomes explicit when he decrees: "The style used by the actor, the writer and the director must be wholly factual (similar in style to the Lenin or Chicherin manifestos, whose easy, flowing rhythm and unmistakable simplicity produce a considerable emotional impact)" (45). Comparing playwrights and actors to Communist leaders, and their product to Communist manifestos, Piscator foregrounds the didacticism inherent in his epic theatre. In his view, everything must be "subordinated to the simple, unconcealed will and aims of the revolution,. . . [even] the new technical and stylistic possibilities" (45). As early as

October, 1920. Piscator articulated a comprehensive theory of political theatre which he would soon put into practice in his Proletarisches Theater.

After staging numerous politically engaged plays, Piscator's Proletarisches Theater folded in April 1921. Ironically, one of the main factors contributing to the collapse was the German Communist Party's withholding of support on the grounds that theatre was art, and that art and propaganda were not compatible. After a brief stint at Central-Theater, Piscator was hired by the long-established and influential Volksbuhne as director for Alfons Paquet's *Flags (Fahnen)* in 1924. At the time of Piscator's hiring, the Volksbuhne could hardly have been called a political theatre. As Piscator explains:

> The Volksbuhne had abandoned every last vestige of aggressiveness, it had been abandoned and digested by the bourgeois theater system. The war failed to open a new era for the Volksbuhne, unless it was the era of its final and irrevocable capitulation to the ruling class. (62)

Although its motto was "Art for the People," Piscator and others felt that the Volksbuhne was ignoring many social ills. During his three years as director, from 1924 to 1927, Piscator sought to turn the Volksbuhne into a political platform:

> The synthesis of art and politics implies final responsibility, implies placing every means, including art, at the service of the highest human aims. Once this has been realized, there was no way out . . . The Volksbuhne had [sic] to make up its mind where it belonged, and from that time on it, and the men at its head, bore the full burden of responsibility. (66)

Throughout his tenure, Piscator produced plays political in content and epic in form.

His first production, *Flags*, utilized two devices that became standard in epic theatre: a revolving stage and film projections. In 1927, his production of Ehm Welk's *Storm over Gothland* was the first successful experiment in the use of filmstrips. By paralleling the action on stage with contemporary events, Piscator provided a historical dimension to his production. Unfortunately, the play became the center of a storm of controversy, which culminated in Piscator's breaking with the company. The conservative and left-wing factions within the company were irreconcilable, and even though the management dissociated itself from Piscator, and Piscator resigned from the company, the controversy spread beyond the confines of the Volksbuhne and became a polarizing issue of censorship and artistic freedom.

One of Piscator's supporters, Tilla Durieux (1880-1971), used her influence to enable Piscator to receive financial backing to open his own company, the Piscator-Buhne. Once again Piscator's theatrical theory underwent expansion: "A new theory emerged, a political and sociological theory of the drama" (185). This new theory consisted in an overthrow of idealism and mimesis in favour of a new kind of dramatic realism:

> We, as revolutionary Marxists, cannot consider our task complete if we produce an uncritical copy of reality, conceiving the theater as a mirror of the times. We can no more consider this our task than we can overcome this state of affairs by theatrical means alone, nor can we conceal the disharmony with a discreet veil, nor can we present man as a creature of sublime greatness in times which in fact socially distort him--in a word, it is not our business to produce an idealistic effect. The business of

> revolutionary theater is to take reality as its point of departure and to magnify the social discrepancy, making it an element of our indictment, our revolt, our new order. (188)

This is the kind of revolutionary theatre Piscator produced at the Piscator-Buhne. His first production was Ernst Toller's *Hoppla! Wir Leben*, the tragic tale about a man who, when released from a lunatic asylum, finds the outside world of the 1920s insane and longs to return to the safety of the asylum. Before he can go back, the man becomes enmeshed in violent political affairs and is sent to prison where, in an attempt to escape insanity, he hangs himself. Piscator's production, while denounced by the conservatives as political agitation rather than art, allowed Piscator to create a new and exciting mode of drama. Insisting on the cause and effect relationship between dramatic form and political engagement, Piscator continued to connect the largely private events occurring on stage with the wider political and economic issues of world conflict. In his co-production of Leo Lania's *Rasputin*, the tale of the Romanoff Czarina and the 'mad monk of Moscow' at the beginning of the Russian revolution, Piscator and Lania added nineteen new scenes to Alexei Tolstoy's original seven, and they utilized filmstrips and a globe-like stage. The filmstrip functioned as a chorus by addressing the audience directly and calling their attention to important details. Once again Piscator's production caused considerable controversy, culminating in a trial which forced Piscator to eliminate the character "Kaiser Wilhelm II" from his play.

In 1928 Piscator followed *Rasputin* with perhaps his most famous production, *The Adventures of The Good Soldier Schwejk*. Based on an uncompleted novel by deceased Czech writer Jaroslav Hasek, *Schwejk* was a collaborative effort by Piscator,

Brecht, Max Brod, Hans Reimann, and Piscator's play reader, Gasbarra. Although the play resembles Aristotelian drama in its linear progression, its overall structure is unequivocally epic, having as it does no dramatic closure. Although there is continual horizontal movement, no destination is ever reached because Piscator, in an attempt to satirize war, sets the stage upon a treadmill. Once again Piscator uses the epic theatre devices of film projections and partial setting to enhance his socially engaged drama. Unfortunately, although *The Adventures of The Good Soldier Schwejk* broke box-office records, the Piscator-Buhne faced financial problems so overwhelming that it was forced to close.

Although Piscator attempted to revive his company, he was unsuccessful. At the same time that Brecht was receiving wide public and official support, Piscator was being ostracized by both the press and the public. He finally left Germany for the Soviet Union in 1931 and returned only twenty years later when he was appointed Intendant of the Theater der Freien Volksbuhne in West Berlin in 1951. For the next fifteen years he continued his work in theatre and gained renown as one of the leading founders of documentary drama with plays such as Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*, Heinar Kieppardt's *The Case of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, and Peter Weiss's *The Investigation*. Piscator died in Berlin on March 30, 1966, but his legacy lives after him. For an entire decade his epic theatre functioned as a vital element in Berlin theatre, and today endures as a pattern for epic dramatists to emulate.

Indisputably, Erwin Piscator did "develop a type of direction which, years later, was proclaimed by others to be 'epic theater'" (75), but the fact remains that Bertolt Brecht usually receives credit for founding epic theatre. Eugen Bertolt Friedrich Brecht,

born in the Bavarian town of Augsburg, on February 10, 1898, began writing poetry as a child. Brecht's poetry, indeed much in his early writings, assigns to women passive roles in which they emerge as plural, nameless, interchangeable objects of the masculine gaze.[7] Like Piscator, Brecht served in and was disillusioned by World War One, as poems such as his "Ballad of the Dead Soldiers" demonstrate. Brecht began writing plays in 1918, at the age of twenty, when he wrote *Baal* in opposition to Expressionism, the dominant trend in German theatre at the time. Brecht rejected the pathos inherent in Expressionist writing, but, as he makes clear in *Brecht on Theatre*, his chief complaint against it resided in the fact that Expressionism

> led to a special kind of solipsism. . . It represented art's revolt against life: here the world existed purely as a vision, strangely distorted, a monster conjured up by perturbed souls. Expressionism vastly enriched the theatre's means of expression and brought aesthetic gains that still have to be fully exploited, but it proved quite incapable of shedding light

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[7]Sara Lennox, in her insightful article "Women in Brecht's Works," *New German Critique* 14 (Spring 1978): 83-96, discusses "the sexism of the early works" and suggests that "not even as sex partners are women in the early works accorded equal rights; they are regarded as sex objects and/or as burdens to their lovers"(85). Even Laureen Nussbaum, in her response to Lennox, "The Evolution of the Feminine Principle in Brecht's Work: Beyond the Feminist Critique," *German Studies Review* 8.2 (May 1985): 217-44, is forced to acknowledge that "one can easily see how the ambivalent relationship between mother and son is thematic in Brecht's early work. It distorts his women figures . . . More often than not, they are just sex-objects, particularly in the ballads of adventure and debauchery. . ."(219). Nor are women the only critics to recognize the misogyny apparent in Brecht's poetry. Arnold Heidsieck, Carl Pietzcher, and Klaus Theweleit have publicly identified the sexist ideology which dominates much of Brecht's early poetry. Ironically, these sexist images sharply contradict the more positive, often complementary women such as Kattrin, Shen Te, and Grusche of the dramatic works, and leave one to ponder how such apparently irreconcilable representations of women are possible within the same consciousness.

on the world as an object of human activity. The theatre's educative value collapsed. (132)

Although Brecht agreed with the Expressionists' desire for change in dramatic content, form, and language, he objected to their idealism and their distancing themselves from political and economic reality. Because Brecht, like Piscator, believed in the necessity of change in society's structure, and because he felt social change results from education of the masses, Expressionism's failure to provide educative value became a liability too large ever to be overcome. Brecht's debut as a director, however, occurred in Berlin in 1922, when he directed Arnolt Bronnen's Expressionist play *Patricide*, an experience which ended badly when Brecht resigned over disputes with the actors. The experience was not a total disaster, however, as it confirmed Brecht's commitment to a career in the theatre and eventually led to his taking up permanent residence in Berlin in September, 1924.

Brecht called his type of drama epic or dialectic theatre. Although epic theatre has become a synonym for Brechtian theatre today, in his later years Brecht seemed to prefer the term 'dialectic theatre' for its affiliation with the theories of dialectical materialism associated with Marx, Engels, and Hegel. In 1956, Brecht introduced his collection of theoretical writings, entitled "Dialectics in the Theatre," with the following:

The works which follow relate to paragraph 45 of the 'Short Organum' and suggest that 'epic theatre' is too formal a term for the kind of theatre aimed at (and to some extent practiced). Epic theatre is a prerequisite for these contributions, but it does not of itself imply that productivity and

> mutability in society from which they derive their main element of pleasure. The term must therefore be reckoned inadequate, although no new one can be put forward. (282)

While the title seems to suggest Brecht's preference for the phrase *dialectical theatre*, the last sentence indicates his reluctance to reject the better known term *epic theatre*. Although Brecht's theatrical theory underwent continual expansion and revision, certain methods and techniques remained constant. Brecht, believing that theatre should teach, especially socialistic doctrine, advocated a narrative style of theatre. Like Aristotle, Brecht advocated intermixing scenes of dialogue with dance and song, but in Brecht's case this mixture sprang from a desire to interrupt the audience's sense of illusion. He also insisted on the historification of the setting and characters because he believed that setting the play in a foreign place and different period would inhibit the audience's empathy. Brecht likewise advocated an objective style of acting in which actors, instead of identifying with the characters they played, stood apart from their roles so that their acting took place in the third, rather than the first, person. Like Piscator, Brecht also recommended moving pictures, filmstrips, and slides shown behind the central action, and he argued for scenery that suggested, rather than re-created, a specific place. He also proposed that changes of scenery occur in full or partial view of the audience. And finally, Brecht often interrupted the central action by addressing the audience directly through prologues, epilogues, and commentaries. The purpose of all these techniques was the same: to alienate or make strange the play from the spectators, thereby minimizing their empathy so that they were better able to evaluate critically the play's message. Any method of presenting events that inhibited identification and emotional

involvement, then, became a legitimate alienation effect of epic theatre.

Speaking about the alienation effect in paragraph forty-five of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1948), Brecht explains its purpose:

> This technique allows the theatre to make use in its representations of the new social scientific method known as dialectical materialism. In order to unearth society's laws of motion this method treats social situations as processes, and traces out all their inconsistencies. It regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words is in disharmony with itself. This also goes for those human feelings, opinions and attitudes throughout which at any time the form of men's life together finds its expression. (193)

Because his plays incorporate numerous contradictions and paradoxes, Brecht hopes that theories of dialectic materialism will aid the audience in both recognizing the inconsistencies and supplying the necessary syntheses. By calling his dramaturgy 'dialectic theatre,' Brecht asserts the exigency of a strategic deployment of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in modern drama. But as Brecht makes clear in his appendices to paragraph forty-five, such intellectual engagement does not preclude enjoyment:

> The theatre of the scientific age is in a position to make dialectics into a source of enjoyment. The unexpectedness of logically progressive or zigzag development, the instability of every circumstance, the joke of contradictions and so forth: all these are ways of enjoying the liveliness of men, things and processes, and they heighten both our capacity for life and our pleasure in it.

Every art contributes to the greatest art of all, the art of living. (277)

In a move beyond Piscator, Brecht agrees with Aristotle's assessment of the importance of the pleasure of learning through a theatrical performance. Like Aristotle, Brecht sees drama's pleasure-giving feature, its ability to heighten one's enjoyment of life, as an important function. Although he prefers the 'zigzag' or episodic plot to the linear progressive plot favored by Aristotle, Brecht shares Aristotle's view of the theatre as a place of enjoyment.

However, Brecht objects vigorously to the Aristotelian notion of *katharsis* because it prevents the audience from thinking about the events presented on the stage. In Aristotelian theatre, Brecht suggests, the spectators become completely engrossed with the action, leading to an emotional climax which releases their tensions, but more importantly leaves them exhausted by play's end. In Brechtian epic theatre, emotional involvement never leads to the spectators becoming totally immersed in the action. Brecht insists on the necessity of breaking the theatre's illusion in order to enable the spectators' reasoning to operate. As Brecht demonstrates in paragraphs four and six of his "Short Organum," he considers the Aristotelian emphasis on pleasure excessive:

> Thus what the ancients, following Aristotle, demanded of tragedy is nothing higher or lower than that it should entertain people. . . And the catharsis of which Aristotle writes--cleansing by fear and pity, or from fear and pity--is a purification which is performed not only in a pleasurable way, but precisely for the purpose of pleasure. To ask or to accept [no] more of the theatre is to set one's mark too low.
>
> Yet there are weaker (simple) and stronger (complex) pleasures which

> the theatre can create. The last-named, which we are dealing with in great drama, attain their climaxes rather as cohabitation does through love; they are more intricate, richer in communication, more contradictory and more productive of results. (181)

Brecht's objection is not to drama's pleasure-giving function itself, but rather to pleasure as the sole function of drama. He believes that spectators should derive pleasure from the involvement of their intellects and therefore he views epic theatre's ability to make people think as its primary purpose. As he suggests in paragraph twenty-four, to qualify as theatre the instruction must be enjoyable, but more importantly, great theatre must be instructive:

> For although we cannot bother [the theatre] with the raw material of knowledge in all its variety, which would stop it from being enjoyable, it is still free to find enjoyment in teaching and inquiring. It constructs its workable representations of society, which are then in a position to influence society. . . . [The audience] must be entertained with the wisdom that comes from the solution of problems. . . . with whatever delights those who are producing it. (186)

Because his plays address social issues, Brecht's epic theatre asks the spectators not only to observe the play, but to think about the issues presented on stage and, when possible, to contribute to social reform. Like Piscator, Brecht envisions theatre as an interactive engagement between those teaching (the play's producers) and those inquiring (the audience). Brecht regards the audience not merely as passive spectators of, but as active participants in, the learning experience known as epic theatre.

Brecht's awareness of epic theatre's potential to create a learning experience becomes most evident in his *Lehrstücke* (singular *Lehrstück*), or plays for learning, written in collaboration with others, such as Elisabeth Hauptmann, Kurt Weil, Hans Eisler, and Paul Dessau around 1928-1939. Brecht began studying Marxism and Leninism in 1926, after having *Das Kapital* recommended to him by Elisabeth Hauptmann. His *Lehrstücke* represent his response to Lenin's exhortation in a speech given to the third all-Russian congress of the Russian Communist Youth Organization on October 2, 1920: "One thing is clear however: during the reorganization of the old capitalist society, the training and education of [the] new generations who will form the communist society cannot be carried out with old methods" (Schoeps 167). These didactic plays of Brecht, primarily written for the political instruction of workers and students, represent a new method of teaching. Although often performed on the regular stage, the *Lehrstücke* were originally intended for schools and workers' organizations where students and workers learned by acting out the plays. Brecht, troubled by audiences' passive and receptive attitudes, wanted, as Karl H. Schoeps records, to combine reception and action:

> The bourgeois philosophers see a big difference between those who act and those who observe. A person who thinks does not make the differentiation. If one makes this differentiation, one leaves politics to those who act and philosophy to those who merely observe. In reality, however, politicians must be philosophers and philosophers must be politicians. There is no difference between genuine philosophy and genuine politics. Having recognized this, the thinker proposes to educate

young people by performing plays that make them actors and observers at the same time. (166-7)

Brecht's desire for an amalgamation between philosophy and politics replicates Piscator's desire for political engagement through epic theatre. Brecht's awareness of the close correlation between theory and practice reflects his awareness of how particular social structures and processes create experiences which are both lived and discursive. Because theory makes political change possible, the *Lehrstücke*, as disseminators of theory, become invaluable. As a rule, the *Lehrstücke* concern themselves with the following specific themes: human domination over nature; the elimination of all things primitive such as organized religion, which stand in the way of progress; the danger of technological progress outdistancing social progress; the importance and necessity of social change; and the concept of abnegation of the self for a higher goal. Of course, in order to be effective, Brecht suggests, the *Lehrstücke* must have a strict form and follow the rules of epic theatre. Their success largely depends upon a thorough understanding of alienation or estrangement effects.

Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*, from the German *verfremden*, to make strange, is usually translated as 'alienation effects' or less frequently 'estrangement effects.' Alienation effects deliberately create a distance between the events and characters on the stage and the audience, thereby allowing spectators the opportunity to intellectualize about what they see on stage. By understanding why characters in a play behave the way they do, the audience can recognize other possibilities. Through the use of alienation effects, the dramatist continually reminds the audience that they are watching a play. As Brecht suggests in paragraphs forty-two and forty-three of his "Short

Organum." A-effects prevent the audience from ever becoming totally immersed in the play:

> The kind of acting that was tried out . . . between the First and Second World Wars . . . is based on the 'alienation effect' (A-effect). A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar. The classical and medieval theatre alienated its characters by making them wear human or animal masks; . . . Such devices were certainly a barrier to empathy, [but] the social aims of these old devices were entirely different from our own.
>
> The old A-effects quite remove the object represented from the spectator's grasp, turning it into something that cannot be altered; the new are not odd in themselves, though the unscientific eye stamps anything strange as odd. The new alienations are only designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today. (191-92)

According to Brecht, alienation effects incorporate any method of depicting an event that discourages identification and emotional involvement. However, as his "Short List of the Most Frequent, Common and Boring Misconceptions about the Epic Theatre" (1944) makes explicit, Brecht recognizes that some emotional involvement is inevitable, perhaps even desirable: "The epic theatre isn't against the emotions; it tries to examine them, and is not satisfied just to stimulate them. It is the orthodox theatre which sins by dividing reason and emotion, in that it virtually rules out the former" (162). Although

not opposed to emotional involvement. Brecht believes that it must not be allowed to interfere with the play's instructional agenda. Just as the audience begins to identify with the events and characters on stage. Brecht's script interjects an explicit reminder that they are watching a play.

Mother Courage and her Children (1939). one of Brecht's best known plays. uses numerous alienation effects to disrupt emotional involvement. Before each scene. Brecht provides brief summaries of the action. thereby informing the audience in advance what will occur so that they can concentrate on the play's social lesson. In the same way. Brecht continually disrupts the action with songs that comment on unfolding events. His use of a simple. non-realistic set. consisting of little more than the canteen wagon being pulled by Mother Courage. makes identification difficult. In addition. although the play's subtitle. "A Chronicle of the Thirty Years' War." establishes certain expectations. one of Brecht's favorite alienation effects is an inversion of accustomed patterns. Not surprisingly then. in Brecht's chronicle. the war's heroes. such as Wallenstein. Tilly. and Gustav Adolf never appear on stage and are replaced by Mother Courage and her children. a cook. a chaplain. and a whore. That *Mother Courage* is set in exotic places such as Sweden. Poland. Moravia. Bavaria. and Italy also serves to alienate the audience. and Brecht's choice of an episodic plot or montage of isolated incidents occurring years and countries apart likewise reminds the audience that they are watching a stage play. Such reminders are vital because *Mother Courage* contains some of the most powerfully moving scenes in modern theatre. such as that in which the mute Kattrin. beating on a drum. sacrifices her own life to save others. or that wherein Mother Courage. while standing over Swiss Cheese's dead body. denies that he is her son. Of

course, it is important to remember why Brecht privileges intellectual engagement over emotional involvement. Thinking in terms of the long-established Western tradition that distrusts and devalues emotion, setting it in derogated binary opposition to reason, Brecht wants to initiate action on the part of the spectators.

Like Piscator, Brecht believes that epic theatre represents an excellent vehicle for political enlightenment that would result in revolution and social reform. As he demonstrates in his appendices to paragraph forty-three of the "Short Organum," Brecht works with the underlying assumption that the world is capable of being changed: "True, profound, active application of alienation effects takes it for granted that society considers its condition to be historic and capable of improvement. True A-effects are of a combative character" (277). Obviously, Brecht shares Piscator's view of epic theatre as a successful blend of art and propaganda. While Brecht does not rule out emotional involvement entirely, he does insist that the emotional impact must be controlled by reason and directed towards active political engagement. And the best way to accomplish this, Brecht suggests, is through the use of alienation effects.

Throughout this dramatic theory and practice, Brecht furnishes numerous means of alienation, including cool acting and gestus. In opposition to Konstantin Stanislavski, who promoted method acting, Brecht in paragraph forty-seven of the "Short Organum" instructs his actors to *demonstrate*, not *become*, the characters they are portraying:

> In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must

> not go into a trance himself. His muscles must remain loose, for a turn of the head, e.g. with tautened neck muscles, will 'magically' lead the spectators' eyes and even their heads to turn with it, and this can only detract from any speculation or reaction which the gesture may bring about. His way of speaking has to be free from parsonical sing-song and from all those cadences which lull the spectators so that the sense gets lost. (193)

Reiterating drama's didactic function, Brecht exhorts actors to refrain from allowing "the sense [to] get lost." If the spectators become entranced by a hypnotic performance, their ability to reason is placed in jeopardy. Even gestures and tone of voice must be modulated to prevent audience identification. Cool acting, according to Brecht, consists of the actor's "invest[ing] what he has to show with a definite gest of showing" (136). The audience must never be allowed to forget that they are watching a play if they are to adopt a socially critical attitude. As Brecht suggests, the actor's cool acting results in his performance "becom[ing] a discussion (about social conditions) with the audience he is addressing. He prompts the spectator to justify or abolish these conditions according to what class he belongs to" (139). Clearly then, cool acting and pattern of movement represent additional alienation effects whereby epic theatre initiates political engagement and social reform.

Obviously, Brechtian epic theatre differs in many respects from Aristotelian drama. In his "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" (1930), Brecht provides the following chart outlining his view of the two methods:

EPIC THEATRE	**DRAMATIC THEATRE**

narrative	plot
turns the spectator into an observer but	implicates the spectator in stage situation
arouses his capacity for action	wears down his capacity for action
forces him to take decisions	provides him with sensations
picture of the world	experience
he is made to face something	the spectator is involved in something
argument	suggestion
brought to the point of recognition	instinctive feelings are preserved
the spectator stands outside. studies	the spectator is in the thick of it. shares the experience
the human being is the object of the inquiry	the human being is taken for granted
he is alterable and able to alter	he is unalterable
eyes on the course	eyes on the finish
each scene for itself	one scene makes another
montage	growth
in curves	linear development
jumps	evolutionary determinism
man as a process	man as a fixed point
social being determines thought	thought determines being
reason	feeling

In a footnote, Brecht asserts that this table "does not show absolute antithesis but mere shifts of accent" (37). Of course, given the different agendas of Aristotelian drama and epic theatre, such shifts in emphasis are only to be expected. Because Brecht and Piscator desired politically engaged theatre, and because Aristotelian dramaturgy was in their view ineffectual as an instrument of social change, they were prompted to create a new kind of theatre: epic theatre. But, like epic poetry, epic theatre's very construction tends to result in the exclusion of women. As Brecht's chart demonstrates, the characteristics of epic theatre conflict with many of the hegemonically prescribed roles for women. While there is not a complete fit--epic theatre's movement "in curves" fits the female side of the binary better than "linear development"--many of the oppositions Brecht constructs, such as decisions/sensations, argument/suggestion, and reason/ feeling, rely upon the foundational patriarchal binary opposition: man/woman. Not surprisingly, then, for many years women have been, at best, peripheral participants in epic theatre.

On the surface it thus appears that epic theatre lies wholly within the male preserve. A closer examination, however, reveals the important, though largely overlooked, role of women in the creation of Brechtian epic drama. John Fuegi, co-creator of the International Brecht Society (IBS) and managing editor from 1971 to 1989 of its annual research volume *The Brecht Yearbook*, demonstrates in his latest book on Brecht, *Brecht and Company: Sex, Politics, and the Making of the Modern Drama* (1994), the extensive female input into Brecht's works. The first woman Fuegi refers to, Elisabeth Hauptmann, long recognized as Brecht's collaborator and lover, made crucial contributions to much of Brecht's work:

> . . . huge sections of some of the most famous "Brecht" plays and large sections of new dramaturgical theories are clearly written by Hauptmann. The body of work known as the *Lehrstücke*--"learning" or "teaching plays"--is unthinkable without her, as are major texts such as *St Joan of the Stockyards* and . . . the final form of *A Man's a Man.* Indeed, the manuscript and biographical evidence strongly indicates . . . that even the most famous text of them all (and certainly the biggest money-maker) *The Threepenny Opera*, is overwhelmingly her work. After World War II, most of the play adaptations done in Berlin are overwhelmingly Hauptmann's work, with Brecht's participation in the writing marginal at best. (145)

Indeed, Fuegi is not alone in his opinion about Hauptmann's authorship. John Willett, arguably Britain's foremost Brechtian scholar, in his article "Bacon ohne Shakespeare?--The Problem of *Mitarbeit*," concurs with Fuegi's assessment of Hauptmann's contributions:

> . . . Hauptmann played a central part, providing the original 'book' for both The *Threepenny Opera* and *Happy End*. . . if Hindemith was one generally unacknowledged originator of the 'Lehrstücke' form, Hauptmann was the other . . . It looks as if Hauptmann's contribution in this area ['Brecht's Berlin Stories'] may have been considerably greater than has been allowed. (125, 128)

Clearly then, Elisabeth Hauptmann, largely ignored or at least widely undervalued by earlier Brecht historians, deserves a place alongside Piscator as a co-founder of "Brechtian" epic drama.

Nor is Hauptmann the only woman collaborator ignored by the critics.[8] Two of Brecht's other lovers, Margarete Steffin and Ruth Berlau, likewise made tremendous contributions to works for which Brecht received both critical and financial tribute. Without Steffin, plays such as *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *Galileo*, *Mother Courage and her Children*, and *The Trial of Lucullus* could not have been written. Indeed, as Fuegi notes, "her death ended the most fertile period of production of Brecht texts. Except for a handful of plays completed in later years with Ruth Berlau, or after the war by Elisabeth Hauptmann, the career of Brecht the world-class dramatist died with Margarete Steffin in Moscow in June 1941" (407). As for Ruth Berlau, not only did she collaborate with Brecht on such well-known plays as T*he Visions of Simone Machard* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, but perhaps her greatest contribution was her model book which combines the text of *Antigone* with a detailed photo series and notes on the creation of the props. As Fuegi remarks, her book "created a high, now widely imitated standard of production documentation" (491). Another woman from whom Brecht took material, Hella Wuolijoki, was not Brecht's lover but she did deserve better treatment than she received from Brecht. When he and his family fled to Finland in 1940 they lived with Wuolijoki. Although she wrote the original script for Brecht's *Puntila*, she

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[8]John Fuegi reports that Hauptmann, Steffin, and Berlau have begun to emerge from Brecht's shadow. On pages 616-19 of his *Brecht and Company*, Fuegi details the current scholarly attempts to identify texts previously ascribed to Brecht, and he suggests that the era of Brecht hagiography is finally coming to an end.

received neither critical nor financial reward. Indeed, like Hauptmann, Berlau, and Steffin's heirs, Wuolijoki died in poverty while Brecht and his heirs lived in luxury and ignored her pleas for assistance. Ironically, in many instances these women collaborators were willing participants in Brecht's plagiarism, engaging in what Fuegi identifies as "The Zelda Syndrome" (147). Zelda Fitzgerald sold some of her short stories under the name of her husband, F. Scott Fitzgerald, because his name would ensure publication and elicit a higher price. These impoverished women, Hauptmann, Steffin, Barlau, and Wuolijoki, agreed for the same reasons to publish their works as though Brecht were the primary author. In addition, all but Wuolijoki were Brecht's lovers and, believing that he had their best interests at heart, readily consented to the literary deception. Of course, the fact that these women lived in a society in which male art was privileged and female art was largely ignored meant that in reality their choice was greatly constrained.

Clearly then, the contributions of these women--Hauptmann, Steffin, Berlau, and Wuolijoki--deserve recognition, the recognition they failed to receive from Brecht. Although he often acknowledged Piscator's contribution to the development of epic theatre, Brecht silently appropriated the works of these women, a fact deplored by Fuegi in the conclusion of his text:

> To bury a Steffin, or a Berlau, or a Hauptmann in a footnote, when they wrote more of the work than Brecht himself, is to deliberately *not* promote consciousness. . . . If "Shakespeare's sisters," to use Virginia Woolf's formulation, wrote much of the works, why should not women everywhere be able to draw strength from the free and open

> acknowledgment of that fact? . . . Should people in future years still be asking the question, Where were the women dramatists of world rank in the first half of the twentieth century, . . . we can urge people to listen to words sung "in a different voice," the voices of Hauptmann's Polly and Jenny as they dream of a tomorrow when women are recognized in their own right, no longer brutalized and silenced by Mackie and his kind. (620-21)

The different voices of these women will no longer be silenced. If "that which exists belong[s] to those who can make it flourish" (Schoeps 365), as suggested by the moral of *The Caucasion Chalk Circle* (1944), written by Brecht in collaboration with Berlau, epic theatre belongs to these women just as surely as it does to Brecht and Piscator. The significant role played by women in epic theatre's creation anticipates the role played by women in its present-day production.

Because epic theatre is political theatre, and because feminism is a politics, it is hardly surprising that devices of epic theatre become invaluable to socialist feminist dramaturgy such as Churchill's. The impact of Brechtian epic theatre extended far beyond Berlin and continues to influence innumerable playwrights, not least of whom is England's Caryl Churchill. Churchill was born near the beginning of World War Two in London, England, on September 3, 1938. As a child, she and her family moved to Montreal, Quebec, where she received her education at the Trafalgar School. She returned to England and enrolled at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, in 1957, and the first production of one of her plays, *Downstairs*, occurred there in 1958. Churchill received her B.A. in English in 1960, and in 1961 she married David Harter, a barrister. For

nearly a decade. Churchill's married life consisted primarily of a succession of pregnancies which resulted in three sons and numerous miscarriages. Although she continued to write during those years, primarily radio plays,[9] as she explains to Erica Beth Weintraub, her role as wife and mother left her feeling somewhat marginalized out of the mainstream:

> I didn't really feel a part of what was happening in the sixties. During that time I felt isolated. I had small children and was having miscarriages. It was an extremely solitary life. What politicised me was being discontent with my own way of life--of being a barrister's wife and just being at home. (12)

Churchill's political consciousness resulted from a slow, subjective process that many feminists have come to identify as the politics of the personal.[10] Gradually, Churchill

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[9]Linda Fitzsimmons, in her *File on Churchill* (Methuen, 1989), offers a complete listing and a brief synopsis of all the radio plays.

[10]The phrase "the personal is political" has long been recognized as a major slogan of feminist theory and politics which assert that personal and intimate experience is not isolated, individual, or undetermined, but rather is social, political, and systemic. Catherine A. MacKinnon, in her insightful article "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," *Signs*, 7.3 (Spring 1982), 515-44, summarizes the slogan's usefulness to feminist theory: "Relinquishing all instinctual, natural, transcendental and divine authority, this concept grounds women's sexuality on purely relational terrain, anchoring women's power and accounting for women's discontent in the same world they stand against. . . . The personal as political is not a simile, not a metaphor, and not an analogy. . . . It means that women's distinctive experience as women occurs within the sphere that has been socially lived as the personal--private, emotional, interiorized, particular, individuated, intimate--so that what it is to *know* the *politics* of women's situation is to know women's lives. . . . To feminism, the personal is epistemologically the political, and its epistemology is its politics"(534-5). For further information about the slogan, see Naomi Weisstein and Heather Booth, "Will the Women's Movement Survive?" *Sister*, 4.12 (Dec. 1975), 1-6; Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreams and Dilemmas*, London: Virago, 1983; and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Personal Is Not Political Enough," *Marxist Perspective*, 2 (Summer 1979), 26-36.

came to understand her own personal experience in terms of the larger classed and gendered society.

One of the most political events in Churchill's life occurred in 1972 when she and her husband changed the way they lived. In a joint decision, Harter left the bar and began working for a legal aid center because, as Churchill tells Weintraub, "We did not want to shore up a capitalist system we did not like" (120). As early as 1972, then, Churchill adopted a radical political stance that, as she explains to Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, cannot fail to manifest itself throughout her plays:

> It's almost impossible not to take [a moral and political stance], whether you intend to or not. Most plays can be looked at from a political perspective and have said something, even if it isn't what you set out to say. . . . Whatever you do your point of view is going to show somewhere. It usually only gets noticed and called "political" if it's against the status quo. There are times when I feel I want to deal with the immediate issues and times when I don't. . . . But either way, the issues you feel strongly about are going to come through, and they're going to be a moral and political stance in some form. Sometimes more explicitly, sometimes less. (79-80)

Churchill's belief that the personal is political becomes one of the basic assumptions of her theatrical theory and practice. And as she makes explicit to Betsko and Koenig, her politics include both socialist and feminist principles: "Of course, socialism and feminism aren't synonymous, but I feel strongly about both and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other" (78). The editorial collective of a special

issue of *Feminist Review*, 23 (1986), offer valuable insights into this kind of socialist-feminist politics:[11]

> By and large the reason why the term 'socialist-feminist' has political resonance is that it reflects a perception of the world as one which contains more than one system of domination. In contemporary Britain we can identify capitalism as an economic system based on the exploitation of the labour of the working class. We can identify imperialism, based on the exploitation and subordination of whole peoples, races, and ethnic groups. And we can identify the system, call it sexism, patriarchy or a sex-gender system, based on the power of men over women.
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> Although in theory these systems have independent existences, in practice the ways in which they relate to and reinforce each other are so important that we cannot really separate them. As socialist-feminists we do not prioritize or privilege the fight against one system over another. (7)

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[11]Of course, socialist feminism is not restricted to British feminists, but my seemingly arbitrary selection of the editorial collective's definition of socialist-feminism, instead of that of American socialist-feminist Zillah R. Eisenstein, for example, is a strategic one. In her interview with Betsko and Koenig, Churchill distinguishes between American and British feminism: "When I was in the States in '79 I talked to some women who were saying how well things were going for women in America now with far more top executives being women, and I was struck by the difference between that and the feminism I was used to in England, which is far more closely connected with socialism" (77). For a further analysis of the British socialist-feminist movement, see Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson, "The British Women's Movement," *New Left Review*, 148 (Nov./Dec. 1984), 74-103, and Michele Barrett, "A Response to Weir and Wilson, "*New Left Review*, 150 (Mar./Apr. 1985), 143-47.

For Churchill, issues of gender cannot be isolated from issues of class and race. Like other socialist feminists, she believes that *any* system that incorporates structures of privilege and domination must become the site of a redefinition of meanings and values. Her socialist feminist perspective is politically useful for women because it recognizes the importance of the subjective in the constitution of meaning in women's lived reality. Through the use of Brechtian epic drama, Churchill addresses the issue of women's experiences by showing the social practices and power relations which structure it.

CHAPTER TWO

But no one is damned. We can all bind the king. (Light Shining in Buckinghamshire)

In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), Churchill uses Brechtian epic devices to interrogate a historical class struggle from a new perspective. She demonstrates how, as Walter Benjamin suggests in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, "the class struggle, which is always present to a historian influenced by Marx, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual thing could exist" (254).[1] Linking ideology with such material interests, Churchill makes explicit the ways in which class societies produce a wide range of competing and often contradictory forms of consciousness which can result in the [re]production of specific forms of power relations. Although history is generally written by the victors, in the particular recreation of history Churchill presents in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, she refuses to empathize with the victors. Instead, by exploring the other side of history, that largely unwritten in the history books, she provides an example of historical materialist critical practice which, Benjamin explains, "call[s] into question every

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[1]Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), a German Jew who achieved posthumous fame as one of this century's finest philosophers, was one of Brecht's earliest supporters and admirers. In her introduction to Benjamin's *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt demonstrates that this respect and admiration were mutual: "Bertolt Brecht, . . . upon receiving the news of Benjamin's death is reported to have said that this was the first real loss Hitler had caused to German literature" (2). Benjamin's influential essay "What is Epic Theatre?" (1939: 147-154) is considered by many Brechtian scholars to be an authoritative text.

victory, past and present, of the rulers" (Benjamin 255). The indestructible connection between past and present becomes concrete in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* because for Churchill, as for Benjamin, "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]" (261). However, the present is not merely a period of transition which culminates in a kind of universal history. As Benjamin explains, "a historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the 'eternal' image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past" (262). In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill engages in historical materialism as she presents a complex and sophisticated blend of characters to stage the unique experiences of individuals with their sometimes common and sometimes disparate pasts.

Churchill wrote *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* in 1976, in conjunction with the Joint Stock Theatre Group, a theatre collective founded in 1973 by William Gaskill, Max Stafford-Clark, David Hare, and David Aukin.[2] One of Joint Stock's earliest productions, *Fanshen* (1975), written by David Hare and based on a book of the same title by William Hinton, is about the political education of the peasants in a Chinese village called Long Bow. The word Fanshen literally means to turn over, and in the context of the play refers to the political enlightenment whereby people change their

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[2]Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop company was set up even earlier than Joint Stock. Although originally established in the 1930s, by 1953 the company had moved into London's Theatre Royal where in 1963 its best known play *Oh What a Lovely War* was first performed.

allegiance from feudalism to communism. Like the epic plays of Piscator and Brecht. *Fanshen* is concerned with dialectics. In an interview with Catherine Itzin, Gaskill discusses how the company became engaged in epic theatre by working on every scene from a political point of view:

> When you say, what is the political point of the scene to an actor, he tries to find out and then tries to demonstrate it. And you start to get epic acting. Something changes. . . . When we were working on *Fanshen* we were part of a political process. . . you couldn't really do it any other way, because that is the way the political meaning is made clear. . . The aesthetic clarity came as a consequence of getting the political line. (221)

Just as the actors in Brecht's *Lehrstücke* learned by acting out the plays, the Joint Stock company became politicised, Gaskill suggests, by applying dialectical methods to their production. *Fanshen* was the result of workshops during which the actors, the directors, and the writer worked together exploring research on Hinton's book and other associated materials. All decisions were based on group discussions. This workshop method replicates the collective working method Brecht promotes in "The German Drama: Pre Hitler" (1936): "We organized small collectives of specialists in various fields to 'make' the plays; among these specialist were historians and sociologists as well as playwrights, actors, and other people of the theatre" (78). That Gaskill was influenced by Brecht is beyond question. In the same interview with Itzen, Gaskill talks about his own politicisation:

> I was really educated politically by theatre and what I've learned about

> politics I've learned through theatre . . . I came to understand that my work had always been political even though I hadn't realised it before . . . I was politicised by the Berliner Ensemble when I first saw them in 1956[3] . . . I'd never seen such good theatre before and . . . it wasn't just because it was wonderfully directed and wonderfully designed and wonderfully acted, but there was something about the whole process of work which was serious and thoughtful in a way we had never seen before . . . it was a different kind of work . . . That was a great revelation. (222)

From 1956 onward, Gaskill attempted to achieve political and aesthetic aims similar to Brecht's, and with the establishment of Joint Stock he was finally able to create Brechtian epic theatre. His assertion that his work was always political, even though he was unaware of it, mirrors Churchill's view about the inevitability of taking a political stance and perhaps helps clarify why Churchill found Joint Stock so appealing. That she did find Joint Stock's political working methods and subject matter attractive is undeniable: after *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, she collaborated with Joint Stock on *Cloud Nine* in 1979 and on *Fen* in 1983.

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire also marked the beginning of Churchill's long-standing collaborative association with Joint Stock director Max Stafford-Clark. As Churchill explains in *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective* (1987), Stafford-Clark's original idea of doing a play about the Crusades gradually

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[3]The Berliner Ensemble is the name of Brecht's theatre collective which was established in East Berlin in 1949 and which, over time, achieved world renown. For a detailed account of the formation of the Berliner Ensemble, see John Willett's *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A study from eight aspects* (London: 1959, 151-2) and Karl H. Schoeps's *Bertolt Brecht* (New York: 1977, 33-9).

transformed itself into the idea of creating a play about the millenial movement during the English Revolution:

> We were excited by the ideas but the crusaders themselves remained a bit remote, and when I read Cohn's *Pursuit of the Millenium* with its appendix of Ranter writings I was seized with enthusiasm for changing to the seventeenth century. We kept the millenial dream and Max's question of why you would turn your life upside down for it, but instead of glimpsing shadowy figures in armour we could hear vivid voices: 'Give give give give up, give up your houses, horses, goods, gold . . . have all things common.' (119)

Like *Fen* and *Cloud Nine*, Churchill's other Joint Stock plays, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* underwent three basic pre-production stages: workshop, writing period, and rehearsals. The workshops included Churchill, Stafford-Clark, music director Colin Sell, the acting company, and Colin Bennett, another Joint stock writer who initially was to co-write the play. Catherine Itzin reports in *Stages in the Revolution* (1980) that the workshops consisted of "debates . . . and talks about specific historical characters. We read a lot and talked about moments of amazing change and extraordinariness in our lives, things turned upside down. We got ourselves fluent with the Bible, so the whole area was opened up and everyone knew what it was about" (283). Although unused to working with actors except in rehearsals, Churchill found the collaborative working method exhilarating and challenging. In her production note to the play, she emphasizes the collective nature of the play's production:

> It is hard to explain exactly the relationship between the workshop and

> the text. The play is not improvised: it is a written text and the actors did not make up its lines. But many of the characters and scenes were based on ideas that came from improvisation at the workshop and during rehearsal. I could give endless examples of how something said or done by one of the actors is directly connected to something in the text. Just as important, though harder to define, was the effect on the writing of the way the actors worked, their accuracy and commitment. (184)

Not surprisingly, then, such a collective working method culminates in a play privileging the collective revolutionary fervour of the Levellers, Ranters, and Diggers, recognized by many as Britain's first socialists.[4]

Indeed, the play's title was chosen strategically by Churchill to focus attention on socialist doctrine. As Fenner Brockway explains in *Britain's First Socialists* (1980), "Light Shining in Buckinghamshire" was the title of the Buckingham Diggers' first manifesto, which was published as early as December, 1648. The pamphlet "called for equality in property, declaring 'all men being alike privileged by birth, so all men were to enjoy the creatures alike without property one more than the other'" (130). Naming her play after a Digger pamphlet, Churchill examines seventeenth-century hierarchical

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[4]In his introduction to Fenner Brockway's *Britain's First Socialists: The Levellers, Agitators and Diggers of the English Revolution* (London: Quartet, 1980), the Rt. Hon. Tony Benn, M.P. credits the Levellers with successfully "formulating a structure of constitutional ideas that was to become the basis for the French and American revolutionaries, and to retain their creative strength right up to the present time" (x). Moreover, Benn goes on to explain that "Even more remarkable were the Diggers, or True Levellers, who established the clear outlines of democratic socialism, including the demand for the common ownership of land, for equal rights for women, for an accountable Parliament and for the provision of public services in health and education" (x).

structures as one stage in an historical continuum of class and gender oppression. As she explains in the introduction to her play, the revolutionaries, despite the Ideological State Apparatus's (ISA) attempt to erase them from history, embody an ideological stance that is as relevant today as it was in the seventeenth century:

> The simple 'Cavaliers and Roundheads' history taught at school hides the complexity of the aims and conflicts of those to the left of Parliament. We are told of a step forward to today's democracy but not of the revolution that didn't happen; we are told of Charles and Cromwell but not of the thousands of men and women who tried to change their lives. Though nobody now expects Christ to make heaven on earth, their voices are surprisingly close to us. (183)

Their voices are "close to us," the play suggests, because their revolutionary fervour was never entirely extinguished. Although the particular form of today's British democracy exists because of "a revolution that didn't happen," Churchill challenges the nature of a democracy which attempts to hide or erase those to the left of center. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin explains that "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255). Additionally, Benjamin suggests, a historical materialist must "approach a historical subject . . . where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, . . . a revolutionary chance in the fight for an oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history . . . " (263). Churchill, by writing the Levellers, Diggers, and Ranters back into history, engages in what Benjamin describes

as an historical materialist approach. Rewriting the English Revolution from the side of the losers, from the perspective of those marginalized within traditional historical accounts, Churchill refuses to accept given social structures as natural and unassailable. Using numerous epic devices, she demonstrates the political potential in collective imagination and engagement and invites the audience to participate in a reclamation of history.

One of the epic devices in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, the minimal use of props, set, and costumes, allows Churchill to "restore . . . theatre's reality as theatre," an epic technique recognized by Brecht in "The Mother Courage Model" (1949) as "a precondition for any possibility of arriving at realistic images of human social life" (219). In her production note to the play, Churchill describes the set of the original production at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, on September 7, 1976: "The play was performed with a table and six chairs, which were used as needed in each scene. When any chairs were not used they were put on either side of the stage, and actors who were not in a scene sat at the side and watched the action. They moved the furniture themselves. Props were carefully chosen and minimal" (185). By keeping the set and props to a minimum, Churchill emulates Brecht's *Mother Courage*, in which the set and props, like the plain and unadorned costumes, underline the austerity and poverty of the characters' lives.

Similarly, by having the actors remain in full view when not in particular scenes, Churchill duplicates Brecht's *Antigone* (1947), as staged by Caspar Nehar, in which the actors sit on long benches while awaiting their cues. In the "Masterful Treatment of a Model" (1948), Brecht explains the purpose of this particular alienation effect: "The

reason why the actors sit openly on the stage and only adopt the attitudes proper to their parts once they enter the (very brilliantly lit) acting area is that the audience must not be able to think that it has been transported to the scene of the story" (212). The primary concern is that the audience members do not become transported to a world of make-believe which inhibits rationality. In "Building up a Part: Laughton's Galileo" (1956/8), Brecht explains how such distancing serves to enhance the audience's pleasure:

> With works of art even more than with philosophical systems it is impossible to find out how they are made. Those who make them work hard to give the impression that everything just happens, as it were of its own accord, as though an image were forming in a plain inert mirror. Of course this is a swindle, and apparently the idea is that if it comes off it will increase the spectator's pleasure. In fact it does not. What the spectator, anyway the experienced spectator, enjoys about art is the making of art, the active creative element. (164)

Distinguishing between experienced and inexperienced spectators, Brecht once again codifies the epic audience as active participants in the theatrical experience. The spectators' pleasure, Brecht suggests, derives from their ability to reason, to recognize that they are alterable and able to alter themselves and the world around them. Like Brecht, Churchill allows her audience to discover how her play is made and thus to become active partners in the process of reclaiming history as their own. Her use of this staging arrangement that interferes with theatrical illusion helps her to engage the audience in her challenge to given social structures as inevitable and unalterable.

The play's construction, twenty-one fairly self-contained episodes, also works as

an alienation effect because it disrupts the continuity of the narrative. In the "Appendices to the Short Organum" (1952), Brecht explains that "it is important that the scenes should to start with be played one after another, using the experience of real life, without taking account of what follows or even of the play's overall sense. The story then unreels in a contradictory manner: the individual scenes retain their own meaning" (278-9). This retention of individual meaning is essential to epic theatre's didacticism, especially in historical plays such as *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Indeed, Walter Benjamin goes so far as to connect explication of individual historical episodes with human redemption:

> A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fulness of its past--which is to say, only a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour*--and that day is Judgement Day. (254)

In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill juxtaposes major historical events like the Putney Debates with seemingly minor events such as a vagrant woman interrupting a preacher's sermon or the enlisting of one particular soldier. Each instance, Churchill suggests, becomes the site of potentially realized humanity, in all its dimensions, including sometimes uncivil and distasteful ones. Believing, like Benjamin, that any resistance to oppressive power is a significant event because it recognizes how things change over time, Churchill acknowledges the political potential of personal

transformation by refusing to privilege any one event.

In the major scene entitled "The Putney Debates," members of the Levellers, for the most part common soldiers, approach Cromwell with their demands for civil rights and a representative government. High-ranking officers such as Henry Ireton, Cromwell's son-in-law, argue against these demands on the grounds that they would endanger property. Predictably, Cromwell sides with Ireton and against the common soldiers. In constructing this scene, Churchill relied upon transcripts and other documentary material from the three-day Putney Debates in 1647. Her depiction of the debate, although considerably condensed, remains true to the original events. Indeed, her "Agreement of the People" (209), as read by Edward Sexby, duplicates the Levellers' constitution entitled *An Agreement of the People for a firme Peace*, in which they argue for the same four democratic principles: that a more democratic system of representation be established; that the present parliament be dissolved within a year; that future parliaments be biennial; and that people have certain inalienable rights, including freedom of religion and freedom from conscription.[5] Additionally, Rainborough's assertion: "For really I think that the poorest he in England hath a life to live as the greatest he; therefore truly sir, I think it's clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent put himself under it" (212), is a much quoted sentence uttered at the Putney Debates by one of the Levellers' most dramatic speakers.

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[5]This constitution is reprinted in full in Samuel Rawson Gardiner's *History of the Great Civil War* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903. 392-94); in A. S. P. Woodhouse's *Puritanism and Liberty* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1950. 439-43), without the preamble; and in Don M. Wolfe's *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1944. 226-34), along with two supporting letters from the Agitators.

Colonel Thomas Rainsborough. Indeed, most of the speeches, including Ireton's infamous response, "All the main thing that I speak for is because I would have an eye to property" (213), are quoted verbatim from the transcripts. As a committed socialist, Churchill recognizes the dramatic significance of the Putney Debates as a precursor to the democratic socialism of England's current Labour Movement, and thus she allows them to stand on their own. Churchill, by her faithful account of the proceedings, interrogates Ireton's perverse logic whereby a select few are justified in accruing to themselves power, wealth, and property, at the expense of those outside their charmed circle.

This belief in a select few has its roots in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, the belief that the elect have been chosen by God, while the many remain tainted by original sin and thus consigned to eternal damnation. Therefore, Churchill juxtaposes the Putney Debates with the scene entitled "Hoskins Interrupts the Preacher," in which Joan Hoskins, a vagrant preacher, challenges a Calvinist minister's selective biblical interpretations. Demonstrating the role of religion as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), the preacher cites Psalm one hundred and forty-nine to promote allegiance to the Roundheads: "Sing unto the Lord a new song and his praise in the congregation of saints. / Let the high praises of God be in their mouth and a two-edged sword in their hand. / To bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron" (200). Using biblical authority, the preacher urges his congregation to join the Parliamentarians in their fight against the Royalists. In his attempt to garner the people's support, the preacher aligns the Roundheads with "the congregation of saints" who "shall take the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever"

(200). The preacher relies upon the ambiguity of the word 'kingdom' and applies this metaphor for heaven to the earthly realm of Charles I. Like Ireton, he relates the doctrine of predestination to civil matters: "[God] has chosen a certain number of particular men to be his elect. None can be added to them and none taken away. And others he has chosen to be eternally damned. . . . So it is God's saints, chosen before their birth, written in the book of life, who will bind the king and the nobles and take the kingdom which will last forever" (200). Hoskins, however, rejects the triply exclusionary notion of particular men and replaces it with the inclusive determiner *all*: "But no one is damned. We can all bind the king" (200). As Hoskins persists in her challenge to his biblical interpretation, the preacher turns to St. Paul--considered by many feminists the most misogynous evangelist--for support in silencing Hoskins: "For St. Paul says, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (201). Hoskins, however, cannot be so easily silenced. Although later in the play she will respond to St. Paul's edict "Let the woman learn in silence" with "fuck off you silly old bugger" (233), here she relies upon scriptural authority to refute the preacher. Rejecting class, gender, and spiritual elects, Hoskins cites Joel 2:28: "And it shall come to pass that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (201). Hoskins replaces Ireton's propertied men with servants, and the preacher's particular men with handmaids. She makes explicit near the end of the scene her rejection of all versions of the elect when the policing power of patriarchy, which demands that male power be respected, erupts into violence and Hoskins is

physically ejected from the service. Screaming to the congregation, she says of the preacher: "In his kingdom of heaven there's going to be a few in bliss and the rest of us in hell. What's the difference from what we've got now? You are all saved. Yes, you are all saved. Not one of you is damned--" (202). Rejecting individualism in favour of collective emancipation, she urges her fellow oppressed people to recognize God in themselves, to accept that a true heaven consists of bliss not just for a select few, but for all. By juxtaposing Hoskins' actions with those of the Levellers at the Putney Debates, Churchill makes both events citable moments for the redemption of humankind and demonstrates women's involvement in resistance and the revolutionary movement.

Interestingly, the Calvinist preacher is not alone in canonizing the Roundheads and demonizing the Cavaliers. In his attempt to recruit, Star labels the Parliamentarians and the soldiers "Christ's saints" (195), and the Royalists "the Antichrist" (195). Not surprisingly for a Christian, Briggs chooses to fight on the side of the saints. And yet, as soon becomes apparent in the scene entitled "Briggs Joins Up," there are different degrees of sainthood. Although Star assures Briggs that "Your officers are not all gentlemen, they're men like you" (199), his very words exclude Briggs from the category of gentleman. And indeed, while not all the officers are gentlemen, many clearly are. When Briggs decides to enlist, he approaches Star:

STAR: You keep your hat on. New style catching on.

BRIGGS: Yes sir. I mean, yes, I do.

STAR: As a sign you're as good as me?

BRIGGS: Yes. Nothing personal, Mr. Star. Before God only.

STAR: Parson seen you like that?

BRIGGS: He said I was a scorpion, sir. Mr. Star. I mean, he said I was a scorpion.

STAR: A hat's all right for a soldier. It shows courage. (198)

Although Briggs keeps his hat on as a sign of his equality with Star, it soon becomes obvious that such equality exists "before God only": in the earthly realm, class distinctions still prevail.[6] Although Briggs corrects himself each time he calls Star sir, he merely replaces one title with another. Conscious of his social inferiority, his status as a working man, he continually calls the corn merchant "Mr. Star." Star discloses the extent of the social gap between them when he tells Briggs, "We've known each other all our lives. Our paths never cross" (199). And yet, in his effort to ensure Briggs' enlistment, Star accepts Briggs' breach of hierarchically enforced social etiquette. However, once the Roundheads have, with the help of soldiers like Briggs, succeeded in defeating the Royalists, class distinctions re-emerge. In the scene entitled "Briggs Writes a Letter," after having witnessed the execution of some of the Levellers, Briggs recognizes that "the officers have all the power, the army is as great a tyrant as the king was" (223). Finally realizing that he has merely helped to replace one elite with another, Briggs declares himself Star's enemy and ends the scene by acknowledging class distinctions and mockingly calling Star "Sir" (223). Once again refusing to distinguish between major and minor events, Churchill demonstrates multiple levels of resistance and confirms her allegiance to the politics of the personal, to collective

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[6]Fenner Brockway, in *Britain's First Socialists* (London: Quartet, 1980), describes how Gerald Winstanley and William Everard, two Digger leaders at the St. George's Hill commune, "went to see General Fairfax and ... refused to remove their hats in his presence, 'because he was but their fellow creature' [which] evidently won his respect" (133).

thought and action via personal transformation. Her use of a Brechtian episodic structure enables her to interrogate the multi-facets of what she calls "a revolution that didn't happen" (183).

However, although an episodic structure can be extremely useful for epic theatre's didactic purposes, the connection between scenes is extremely important to that didacticism, as Brecht explains in "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949):

> the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgement. (If it were above all the obscurity of the original interrelations that interested us, then just this circumstance would have to be sufficiently alienated.) The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within a play. (201)

In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill uses numerous easily noticed knots to bind the episodes together, including prologues, epilogues, monologues, and introductions. At the beginning of the scene entitled "Cobbe's Vision," for example, Churchill provides a prologue in the form of one of the actors "announc[ing] a pamphlet by Abiezer Coppe" (205), one of the two Ranters whose writings have survived. By preceding Cobbe's vision with the actual words of Coppe, Churchill reinforces the play's historic element while at the same time inhibiting theatrical illusion. Having just heard Coppe's "fiery flying roll" (205), his harangue against "the great ones of the earth" (206), the audience can better understand Cobbe's religious zeal. The use of the prologue allows Churchill both to introduce and to prepare for the scene which follows.

Except for an identification of the date by a different character on each day of the Putney Debates, "Cobbe's Vision" is the only instance of the use of a narrator in Act One. However, Churchill uses narrators extensively in Act Two, including in prologues and an epilogue by the same actor in the first scene, entitled "Diggers." Prior to the Diggers telling their story, an actor who serves as a narrator announces "information of Henry Sanders, Walton-upon-Thames, April the sixteenth, sixteen hundred and forty-nine" (219), which he proceeds to read like a police report. He is succeeded by Digger founder, Gerald Winstanley, who reads "the true Levellers' standard advanced," a Diggers' manifesto in which he defines the fundamental principles of socialism and promotes communal interests over individual interests vested in property. Winstanley is followed once again by the narrator, who announces what is to follow as "A Bill of Account of the most remarkable sufferings that the Diggers have met with since they began to dig the commons for the poor on George Hill in Surrey" (219-20). The narrator, by his characterization of the Diggers' "remarkable sufferings," condemns the oppressors and valorizes those who work "for the poor." After various Diggers recount the raid on their commune, the narrator returns with a epilogue which enables him, like Brecht's storyteller in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944-45), to comment on the preceding action. Throughout the scene, the narrator's comments, his prologues and epilogue, provide each segment with the structure of a play within a play.

Although in the two previous instances the narration takes the form of prologues and epilogues, Churchill also presents two scenes, "The War in Ireland" and "Lockyer's Funeral," in which a monologue comprises the whole scene. In "The War in Ireland," one of the actors reads a "Soldier's standard to repair to, addressed to the army, April

sixteen hundred and forty-nine," in which other soldiers are advised that the cause of "the Irish natives in seeking their just freedom, immunities and liberties is exactly the same with our case here" (224). Similarly, in "Lockyer's Funeral," one of the actors reads an account of the funeral of one of the Levellers' executed leaders, Robert Lockyer, "from *The Moderate*, a Leveller newspaper, April the twenty-ninth, sixteen forty-nine" (228). In both instances, the narrator provides a historical account of a particular incident from an openly political perspective. By inserting excerpts from a Leveller newspaper and a soldier's standard, Churchill gives a voice to those marginalized and/or ignored by traditional historical accounts. These narrative scenes serve as explicit 'knots' which allow the audience "a chance to interpose [their] judgement" on what has gone before and on what follows.

In another narrative scene, "A Butcher Talks to his Customers," the narration takes the form of a monodrama.[7] Facing the theatre audience, the butcher rails against his imaginary audience, his gluttonous upper-class customers who stuff themselves while others all around them die of hunger:

> Two rabbits, madam, is two shillings, thank you. And Sir? A capon? Was yesterday's veal good? Was it? Good. Tender was it? Juicy? Plenty of it ? Fill your belly did it? Fill your belly? . . . You don't look hungry. You don't look as if you need a dinner. . . . What do you need it

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[7]Although the phrase dramatic monologue can refer to plays in which one character speaks in the form of a monologue or soliloquy, it most commonly refers to a poem in which a speaker other than the poet addresses a silent or absent audience. For that reason, I have chosen the word momodrama, defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as a play or scene in which only one character speaks, to describe the Butcher's dramatic monologue.

> for? No, tell me. To stuff yourself, that's what for. To make fat. And shit. When it could put a little good flesh on children's bones. . . . You've had their meat that can't buy any meat. You've stolen their meat. Are you going to give it back? . . . I said give them their meat. You cram yourselves with their children's meat. You cram yourselves with their dead children. (227-28)

Becoming angrier as the scene progresses, the butcher's language becomes more vehement and more profane as he yells at his audience to give back the children's meat, and the gap between the imagined *you* and *them* widens. The butcher's diatribe is likely to cause more than a few disconcerting moments for the play's audience, many of whom have likely preceded their evening's entertainment with an expensive dinner. Immediately following the scene in which a destitute woman has been forced to abandon her baby in order to save its life, the butcher's monodrama implicates the audience in the deaths of the children who die annually from hunger and starvation. By inserting this monodrama where she does, Churchill challenges the audience to interpose their judgement not only of the butcher's customers, but of themselves. Like Brecht, who ends "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949) with the assertion that epic theatre "leaves its spectators productively disposed even after the spectacle is over" (205), Churchill uses narrative strategies such as the butcher's monodrama to foster a pro-active disposition within her epic audience. Her intricate knotting together of scenes serves to enhance and explicate the play's didactic message.

Churchill employs music, like the various narrative strategies, as a visible knot that binds individual scenes. As Brecht explains in "The Modern Theatre is the Epic

Theatre" (1930), music plays a fundamental role in this kind of theatre. As a supplement to his chart distinguishing between Dramatic Theatre and Epic Theatre.[8] Brecht also provides a chart which demonstrates the different emphasis of dramatic and epic music:

DRAMATIC OPERA	EPIC OPERA
The music dishes up	The music communicates
music which heightens the text	music which sets forth the text
music which proclaims the text	music which takes the text for granted
music which illustrates	which takes up a position
music which paints the psychological situation	which gives the attitude

(38)

Like epic theatre as a whole, epic music aims to create a new attitude on the part of the audience, the attitude of an active, rational, equal participant in social change. The music itself becomes an alienation effect since it resists "the smooth incorporation which is generally expected of it and [which] turns it into unthinking slavery" (Brecht 203). Instead, as Brecht suggests in "On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre" (1957), while speaking about Kurt Weill's music in *The Threepenny Opera*, (1928) the music must "become an active collaborator in the stripping bare of the middle class corpus of ideas" (85-86). Like the text, the music is meant to instruct the audience, to arouse their

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[8]The reader's attention is directed to the chart provided in Chapter One, pages 35-36, of this dissertation. This chart can also be found in the chapter entitled "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" (1930), in John Willett's translation of *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1964. 33-42).

capacity for action. Music, an important epic device that makes explicit the play's didactic message, can only be effective, Brecht suggests, if the actors adopt a critical and political attitude when they sing the songs. In "The Literarization of the Theatre" (1931), Brecht outlines how the songs should be sung:

> When an actor sings he undergoes a change in function. Nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has left the level of plain speech and started to sing. The three levels--plain speech, heightened speech, and singing--must always remain distinct . . . The actor must not only sing but show a man singing. His aim is not so much to bring out the emotional content of the song (has one the right to offer others a dish that one has already eaten oneself?) but to show gestures that are so to speak the habits and usage of the body. (44-45)

Once again, Brecht's emphasis is on detachment, on the rejection of empathy. However, as Brecht explains in "'Der Messingkauf': An Editorial Note" (1952), the elimination of empathy does not mean eliminating emotion altogether. In response to an actor's question "Does getting rid of empathy mean getting rid of every emotional element?" Brecht replies: "No, no. Neither the public nor the actor must be stopped from taking part emotionally; the representation of emotions must not be hampered, nor must the actor's use of emotions be frustrated. Only one out of many possible sources of emotion needs to be left unused, or at least treated as a subsidiary source—empathy" (173). Clearly then, epic theatre audiences are expected to take part emotionally in the play's production, to engage jointly the faculties of reason and emotion in an effort to

understand the play's didactic message.[9] Recognizing that emotions have a definite class and gender basis, that the form they take is historical, restricted, and limited in specific ways, Churchill critiques the polarization inherent in the reason/emotion binary. Her songs, biblical passages and nineteenth-century poetry set to music, link particular emotions with particular interests and foster an active and practical critical attitude in the audience.

The play opens with a biblical passage, Isaiah 24:17-20, sung by the entire cast, which sets the stark and somber mood sustained throughout most of the play. In some respects, the historical context of the Book of Isaiah resembles that of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Isaiah, who ministered in Judah c. 740-680 B.C., predicted the conquest of Jerusalem by Assyria, the invincible superpower of the day. Isaiah saw this as the culmination of God's judgement against the widespread apostasy of Judea under King Ahaz, and he argued that the only hope of escape was God's intervention, not political alliances, material wealth, or religious pretense. Beginning her play with this passage from Isaiah, Churchill establishes the religious fervency evident throughout the

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[9]Alison M. Jaggar identified "the simultaneous necessity for and interdependence of faculties that our culture has abstracted and separated from each other: emotion and reason, evaluation and perception, observation and action" (165), in "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," an article in *Gender/ Body/ Knowledge: Feminist Reconstruction of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1989). Jaggar's assertion strongly resembles Brecht's statement about epic theatre's synthesis of reason and emotion as articulated in the "Short List of the Most Frequent, Common and Boring Misconceptions about the Epic Theatre." Although previously quoted in Chapter One of this dissertation, Brecht's comment bears repeating: "The epic theatre isn't against emotions: it tries to examine them, and is not satisfied just to stimulate them" (162). Although some feminist drama scholars such as Amelia Howe Kritzer argue that epic theatre valorizes the binary opposition between reason and emotion and thus associates creativity and political action with the traditionally masculine sphere of rationality, Brecht's comment would seem to suggest that this is not an entirely accurate assessment.

play, from the first scene, "Cobbe Prays," to the final prayer meeting of the Ranters. Foregrounding the image of the pit, "Fear, and the pit, and the snare are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth" (191), Churchill demonstrates how the lives of the majority of people have become a living hell on earth. By concluding her song with verse twenty, "The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it: and it shall fall and not rise again" (191), Churchill inscribes a mood of pessimism at the beginning, which is borne out by the play's ending. Against Isaiah's optimistic ending, "'As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,' declares the Lord, 'so will your name and descendants endure'" (Isaiah 66:22), Churchill offers Hoskins' final assertion in the last scene: "I think what happened was, Jesus Christ did come and nobody noticed. It was time but we somehow missed it. I don't see how" (240). In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, the millennium, like the revolution, becomes an event that did not happen.

The pessimistic mood is disrupted only once, immediately after the Parliamentarians' successful ouster of Charles I and the Royalists. At the end of the scene entitled "Briggs Recalls a Battle," a soldier, Briggs, utters a monologue describing "the paradise" of freedom and gladness wrought from the massive death and injury, his own included, on the battlefield:

> I saw it didn't matter because what we were fighting was not each other but Antichrist and even the soldiers on the other side would be made free and be glad when they saw the paradise we'd won, so that the dead on both sides died for that, to free us of that darkness and confusion we'd

lived in and brings [sic] us all into the quiet and sunlight. And even when they moved me the pain was less than the joy. (208)

Briggs's euphoric conviction that a New Jerusalem is at hand allows him not only to transcend physical pain, but to be generous to his former enemies, the soldiers on the other side. The religious imperative, the belief that God would not subject his people to such pain and suffering without good reason, manifests itself in Briggs's belief that the bloody civil war must culminate in a better world for all. Because for Briggs and the Parliamentarians the king and the Royalists represent the Antichrist, the forces of darkness, their defeat signals a universal move towards paradise, towards the light of Christ. This emerging sense of universal liberation finds expression in the lines from Walt Whitman's nineteenth-century poem "Song of the Open Road" sung by the entire cast immediately following Briggs's monologue. Now, the song suggests, quiet replaces confusion, hope replaces despair, and "all seems beautiful" (208) and blessed.

And yet, given the play's historical context, such exhilaration cannot last. As more and more people, even those from the winning side, realize that Civil War has merely replaced royal tyranny with a different, though no less harsh, ruling class, the optimism dissipates. This new ruling class is made manifest in the scene entitled "The Vicar Welcomes the New Landlord," in which Star, a former revolutionary leader, becomes the new squire, despite his assertions to the contrary. So, where previously Churchill used the "Song of the Open Road" to illustrate the mood of Christian tranquility and fellowship accompanying the Roundhead victory, she follows the prayer meeting near the end of the play with another song based on Ecclesiastes 5:7-10, 12, which restores the somber, pessimistic mood with which the play began. Repeating

words from the book of Ecclesiastes, considered by many biblical scholars to be the most pessimistic and questioning book of Jewish and Christian scripture, the singers urge the audience to "marvel not" when they see "oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgement and justice" (239).[10] If "he that is higher than the highest" (239), God, merely regards and does nothing, the song asks, why then should the audience be surprised by such social injustices? As long as they are allowed, the song suggests, ruling classes will continue with total impunity to oppress the poor working classes. Not surprisingly, given the bleak and despondent mood sustained throughout, the play culminates with the image of a world "fraught with . . . clamour, strife and contention" (241), a world much like the pit described in the play's opening song. Throughout the play, then, Churchill uses songs not only to separate episodes and move the action forward, but also, in the words of Bertolt Brecht, "to strip bear the middle class corpus of ideas," to take up a position and present an attitude.

Kurt Weill, Brecht's most frequent musical collaborator, suggests that music is important to epic theatre because "it can reproduce the *gestus* that illustrates the incident on the stage: it can even create a kind of basic *gestus* (*Grundgestus*), forcing the action into a particular attitude that excludes all doubt and misunderstanding about the incident in question" (Brecht 42). The particular attitude expressed by Churchill in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is one expressed consistently by historians influenced by

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[10]In the new international version of the *Serendipity Bible For Study Groups* (Littleton, Colorado: Zondervan, 1981), the commentators describe the characteristics of Ecclesiastes, in part, as follows: "This book has always raised questions concerning its appropriateness in the OT canon. Its apparent pessimism and questioning of beliefs that are central to Judaism and Christianity has led many to reject or ignore it. Others have tried to explain it as what Solomon would have said on an "off" day . . . " (852).

Marxist theory, that is, historical materialism. The concept of *gestus*, or social gest, was first introduced by Brecht in his influential essay "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" (1930). In a note to the essay, John Willett, Brecht's translator, explains that "'*Gestus*,' of which '*gestisch*' is the adjective, means both gist and gesture: an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions" (42). In a later essay, "On Gestic Music" (1957), Brecht himself provides the following definition: "'Gest' is not supposed to mean gesticulation: it is not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes. A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men" (104). And yet, as Brecht explains, a distinction must be made between social gests and gests in general: "Not all gests are social gests. . . . the social gest is the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances" (104). Only social gests, Brecht implies, function as epic theatre devices. In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill utilizes social gests in two scenes: "Two Women Look in a Mirror" in Act One, and "The Meeting" in Act Two.

In the scene entitled "Two Women Look in a Mirror," one peasant woman calls to her friend to come and look in the piece of mirror she has stolen from her former master's house. Because neither woman is identified, both come to represent all lower-class women living in the master's house, that is, under patriarchal, class domination. The women's excitement upon seeing themselves in the mirror becomes a social gest for their social empowerment. Becoming visible to themselves for the first time, the peasant women confidently assert their equality with upper-class women: "They must know what they look like all the time. And now we do" (207). Attempting to bridge

the chasm between social classes, between *they* and *we*, these women relish their apparent equality with their former rulers. And yet their apparent social empowerment becomes ironic for those members of the audience who recognize the mirror as a tool of female oppression, an object that presupposes how women in patriarchal societies are expected to look.[11] As a result of the Roundhead victory, the landlord, obviously a Royalist sympathizer, has abandoned his home and lands, leaving them to be pillaged by former servants. Explaining that she and the other peasants burned the landlord's papers, "that's the Norman papers that give him his lands. That's like him burnt" (207), the first woman demonstrates her awareness of the connection between ownership and power. The peasant woman's participation in pulling down the "pictures of him [the lord] and his grandfather and his great great" (207), symbols of the master's power, becomes a social gest for the destruction of class power. Churchill presents the entire scene from a social point of view, including a recognition and acknowledgment of hierarchies of power grounded in both class and gender.

In the scene entitled "The Meeting," the second-last scene of the play, the social gest takes the form of parody. The Ranters, holding their prayer meeting in a drinking establishment, parody religion as a whole, and the sacrament of communion or Eucharist in particular. In the play's first scene, Cobbe distinguishes between prayer and swearing: "this is a prayer, oh God, no swearing. Rich men of Antichrist on horses swear, king's officers say 'dammee' laughing" (191). By the time of the prayer meeting, however, Cobbe's prayers degenerate into a litany of blasphemy:

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[11]For a detailed account of how visual images can serve to oppress women, see John Berger's discussion of the mirror in *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking, 1973).

> Damn. Damn. Damn. Damn. Damn. . . . Damn the hellfire presbyterian hypocrites that call a thief a sinner, rot them in hell's jail. They say Christ's wounds, wounds, wounds. Stick your finger in Christ's arsehole. He had an arsehole. Christ shits on you rich. Christ shits. Shitting pissing spewing puking fucking Jesus Christ. Jesus fucking— . . . Riches is the cause of all wickedness. From the blood of Abel to those last Levellers shot. But God is coming, the mighty Leveller, Christ the chief of Levellers is at the door, and then you'll see levelling. (230-31)

Cobbe, sickened by religious hypocrisy and oppression, finds release in screaming vulgarities and expletives. Hating all hierarchies, Cobbe insists on bringing God down to a human level, on identifying Christ with the realm of bodily functions, particularly excretions. Christ, the greatest leveller, must live with the common people if he is to eradicate the wickedness associated with wealth. Cobbe's vituperative outburst is immediately followed by Hoskins' symbolic Eucharist. Holding an apple aloft for all to see, Hoskins asserts "This is something by a farmer. Then by a stallholder. Then by me. It comes to me God's in it. If a man could be so perfect. Look at it" (231). Hoskins, like Cobbe, insists on God's humanness. Because, as she later tells Brotherton, "it's a man wrote the bible" (235), Hoskins rejects a completely male trinity in favour of one at least partially female, one consisting of the farmer, the stallholder, and herself. As each of the Ranters holds the apple, he or she examines it closely before passing it to the next person, until finally it is passed to the Drunk, who eats it. Relying upon the numerous symbolic associations of the apple, for example as the cause of the

fall of Eve and Adam, Churchill constructs Hoskins's parodic communion as an explicit social gest. In "On the Use of Music in Epic Theatre" (1957), Brecht suggests that through the use of social gests "the spectator is given the chance to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history. The idea is that the spectator should be put in a position where he can make comparisons about everything that influences the way in which human beings behave" (86). Hoskins's social gest becomes particularly important because through it the audience, like the Ranters themselves, can challenge religious structures grounded in fixed hierarchies of power. Like Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Hoskins and the others spend the rest of the scene waiting for God, who, like Godot, never appears. And yet, the scene ends with the most cogent social gest of all: Brotherton adds to the communal meal the food she had previously kept back from the others. Brotherton's acceptance of her own worthiness, culminating in this powerful social gest, signals the possibility of a new kind of communion, a communion grounded in and benefitting humanity. However, by following the prayer meeting with the "After" scene, Churchill acknowledges the realities of the current political situation in capitalist, patriarchal Great Britain. The kind of collectivism represented by the social gests in "The Meeting" remains a remote possibility only.

A final example of Churchill's collective vision can be seen in her innovative assignment of the twenty-five roles to the four male and two female actors of the original cast. Not only do the actors play numerous characters, different actors play the same character in different scenes. In an interview with Ronald Hayman, published under the title "Double Acts" (1980), Churchill explains how the idea for this

extraordinary doubling originated:

> There were half a dozen people being traced through the events, and everyone was going to perform minor parts in others' stories. But then we [Churchill and the play's director Max Stafford-Clark] had the idea jointly--we suggested it jokingly, and then came back to it: 'What we ought to do is let everybody play different parts, and not worry about characters going through.' That reduced the number of scenes it needed, and it made everyone's experience seem shared. In a war or a revolution the same things happen to a lot of people. (27)

Churchill uses this unique doubling to replace the individuality of the characters with a multiple viewpoint which directs the audience's attention to the overall shape of the experiences rather than to the individual experiences themselves, thereby disrupting the audience's identification, or empathy, with individual characters. In his "Notes to Die Rundköpfe und Die Spitzköpfe" (1938), Brecht provides an explanation of his alienation effects that helps explain how Churchill's innovative doubling functions as an alienation effect: "It was not the 'eternally human' that was supposed to emerge, not what any man is alleged to do at any period, but what men of specific social strata (as against other strata) do in our period (as against any other)" (100). Like Brecht's *The Round Heads and the Pointed Heads*, then, Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* utilizes a non-psychological depiction of characters to interrogate the role of social class on individuals in specific historical contexts.

Walter Benjamin identifies some distinguishing features of classes historically engaged in revolutionary movements: "The awareness that they are about to make the

continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action" (261). Benjamin's description accurately captures the revolutionary fervour displayed by many of the characters in Churchill's play. Cobbe, for example, the first character the audience encounters, immediately exhibits the subversive passion which will cause him to abandon his privileged heritage and join the religious commune of Ranters. In the scene entitled "Cobbe Prays," Cobbe damns his family for "eating so quietly [given] what is going on outside our gate" (192). Unlike his father, Cobbe hears the cries of the poor outside the family home: "The beggar swore when they whipped him through the street and my heart leapt at each curse, a curse for each lash. Is he damned? Would I be? At table last night when father said grace I wanted to seize the table and turn it over . . . " (191). Putting himself in the beggar's position, Cobbe rejects the hypocritical religion of his father. Boldly ending his prayer by asserting "I cannot go down to him [his father]. It is a sin to go down. I will wait till I hear the door. To avoid his blessing" (192), Cobbe refuses to accept the religio-political codes which allow the upper classes to oppress the lower. It is a sin to obey the fourth commandment, Cobbe suggests, when obeying it means honouring "a greedy, cruel, hypocritical" (192) father. When God appears to Cobbe in a vision, God explains to Cobbe that his salvation depends upon rejecting a life of ease and luxury in favour of a life of poverty and deprivation: "I will take thee to my everlasting kingdom. But first you must drink a bitter cup, a bitter cup, a bitter cup" (206). Like Christ, Cobbe must drink from a bitter cup of pain and suffering if he is to lead people to salvation, to go to London "and tell them I [God] am coming" (206). At the prayer meeting, it becomes obvious that Cobbe, like Jesus, identifies and associates with those rejected by society,

"the cripples, thieves, and whores" (234). Telling the others: "You are God. Every poor man. . . . You are God, I am God" (239), Cobbe inscribes members of all classes with a common divinity. Like Hoskins, who argues that "we can all bind the king" (200), Cobbe empowers the poorest of the poor by helping them to recognize God within themselves. By having different actors play Cobbe in each scene, Churchill suggests that Cobbe's politicization represents a struggle for human dignity and democracy that permeates every level of society.

Although from a much less privileged class than Cobbe, Claxton exhibits a similar revolutionary desire for social change. In the scene entitled "The Vicar Talks to his Servant," Churchill demonstrates the conditions against which Claxton rebels. Throughout the scene, a self-involved Anglican minister fails to recognize, let alone acknowledge, the pain and suffering endured by his congregation. When the servant, Claxton, tells the minister that his ailing baby is worse, the minister first absent-mindedly responds "Good, good," followed by the platitudinal cold comfort of "God tries you severely in your children" (192). The minister's uncaring ineffectiveness becomes obvious when, in the face of massive hunger and sickness, he ironically offers the servant an orange. Not surprisingly, then, in the scene in which Claxton brings Hoskins home, Claxton demonstrates how he has become politicized by such indifference. Quoting from chapter twenty-one of the book of Revelations about there being no more sea in the new heaven and the new earth, Claxton associates his current living conditions with the end times described by John:

> What it's saying, seems to me. Fish can live in it. Men can't. Now men can't live here either. How we live is like the sea. We can't breathe.

> Our squire, he's like a fish. Looks like a fish too, if you saw him. And parson. Parson can breathe. He swims about, waggles his tail. Bitter water and he lives in it. Bailiff. Justices. Hangman. Lawyer. Mayor. All the gentry. Swimming about. We can't live in it. We drown. I'm a drowned man. (205)

Like Cobbe, Claxton recognizes the huge gap between rich and poor, between the upper and lower classes. Claxton's list of fish--the squire, parson, bailiff, justices, hangman, lawyers, and mayor--demonstrates how social, religious, and legal structures interact to oppress the poor, to choke off their very existence. Feeling like a drowned man, Claxton concludes that only "a new heaven and a new earth" (205) can save him. Leaving his home and family to become "the Captain of the Rant" (221), Claxton realizes that religious codes of sin serve to oppress the poor, and he argues that "there is no sin but what man thinks is sin" (221). Appropriating the bitter water in which he previously drowned, Claxton uses it to perform a new kind of baptism, a baptism in which the person being baptized becomes a fluid expression of God's divinity: "A baby doesn't need baptism to make him God, he is God. He's not born evil. He's born good. He's born God. When he died it was like a pail of water poured back in the ocean. He's lost to himself but all the water's God" (237). Like Hoskins, Claxton rejects the doctrine of the elect, and like Cobbe, he recognizes God in his fellow humans. Because Claxton, Hoskins, and Cobbe come from such diverse social classes, the play suggests that the establishment of an egalitarian society requires a collective politicization of all classes, an argument strengthened by having many different actors play each role.

Of all the play's characters, Margaret Brotherton, a vagrant woman, perhaps

suffers most from the non-egalitarian conditions under which she lives. The audience first encounters Brotherton early in the play in the scene entitled "Margaret Brotherton is Tried," in which two Justices of the Peace try Brotherton for vagrancy.[12] Throughout the scene the male JPs decide Brotherton's fate as though she herself were not present. Restricted to brief one- or two-word answers, such as her name and place of birth, Brotherton is effectively silenced by the two JPs, the representatives of patriarchal power and authority. The JPs, while telling Brotherton that they only help the poor from their own parish, lament what they see as their parish's overly liberal "system of poor relief that brings them [the poor]--they hear there's free bread and cheese, free fuel, there's no parish for miles that does that" (194). Brotherton, doubly oppressed by class and gender inequities, is found guilty of vagrancy, that is, poverty, and sentenced "to be stripped to the waist and beaten to the bounds of this parish and returned parish by parish to . . . where she was born" (194). That Brotherton's sentence includes being stripped to the waist inflicts on her a divesture of modesty designed to degrade and humiliate her as a woman. In the scene entitled "Brotherton Meets the Man," Brotherton encounters a vagrant man who treats her as a common whore. To his suggestion "Come and lie down. Out of the wind. I'll give you a halfpenny," Brotherton responds "No. With tenpence, we can get indoors for that" (198). Driven by poverty and patriarchal hierarchies of power, Brotherton, like many poor women before and since, subjects her body to prostitution, a high-risk activity in terms of exposure to physical abuse, health problems, and emotional strain, in an effort to survive. At the

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[12]Throughout the scene, the speech headings of the Justices of the Peace are abbreviated by Churchill as 1ST JP and 2ND JP.

prayer meeting, Brotherton reveals the lengths to which the emotional strain of being an impoverished woman within feudal patriarchy has driven her: "I killed my baby. The same day it was born. I had a bag. I put it in the ditch. There wasn't any noise. The bag moved. I never went back that way" (237). Engaged in a day-to-day struggle for her very existence, Brotherton instinctively abandons anything that potentially interferes with her ability to survive. But, as Briggs assures her, "That's not your sin. It's one more of theirs. Damn them" (237). Briggs indicts the uncaring *them* who create an economic and social climate that drives women to abandon their children. And yet, Brotherton's final words of the play, "Stole two loaves yesterday. They caught another woman. They thought she did it, took her away. Bastards won't catch me" (240), demonstrate how the continuous struggle against poverty and oppression tends to degrade women and culminate in a narrow, self-interested attitude that makes collective resistance impossible. The fact that the two female actors of the original cast played the role of Brotherton interchangeably reinforces the notion that social conditions, in conjunction with individual qualities, determine women's lived reality. Because the same two actors also play the unnamed women in the scene entitled "A Woman Leaves her Baby," in which, in an act of desperation similar to Brotherton's, a starving woman abandons her baby because she cannot feed it, Churchill connects and generalizes the desperate experiences of lower-class women in patriarchal societies.

Not all poor women abandon collective resistance and accept unconditionally given social structures as natural and unalterable. Hoskins, the vagrant preacher, continually fights against class and gender hierarchies wherever she encounters them. Immediately after being physically evicted from the church, Hoskins is aided by

Claxton, who takes her home to have her wounds attended by his wife. While Hoskins and Claxton reaffirm their belief that "only the rich go to hell" (204), Claxton's wife demonstrates the extent to which she has accepted her own subjugation:

> But women can't preach. We bear children in pain, that's why. And they die. For our sin, Eve's sin. That's why we have pain. We're not clean. We have to obey. The man, whatever he's like. If he beat us that's why. We have blood, we're shameful, our bodies are worse than a man's. All bodies are evil but ours is worst. That's why we can't speak. (204)

Claxton's wife repeats religious dogma which, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the General Editor of *The Woman's Bible* (1898), suggests, "teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she percipitated the fall of the race . . . Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty" (13). Because her identity is totally bound by her role as Claxton's wife, she is given no name in the play, only the title WIFE. To her assertion that because women are so sinful they cannot speak, Hoskins responds "Well I can" (204). Refusing to be silenced as prescribed by selective biblical authority, Hoskins, like Briggs, puts the blame for dying children where it belongs: "They die because how [sic] we live. My brothers did [sic]. Died of hunger more than fever. My mother kept boiling up the same bones. . . . No, I'm out with God. You want to get out too" (204-5). Hoskins, unlike Brotherton, desperately wants collective emancipation, wants to help Claxton's wife who, because her child died, believes she is being punished for her sins. Asserting, "We wouldn't be punished

God who resides with the poor, a God who is, as she explains at the prayer meeting, "not far above us like he used to be when preachers stood in the way" (233). Hoskins, like Cobbe and Claxton, sees God in others, as can be seen when she tells Brotherton: "He's *our* fellow creature, and you're *our* fellow creature" (238). As my added emphasis demonstrates, Hoskins promotes collective economic, sexual, and religious freedom. Having the role of Hoskins played interchangeably by the women actors enables Churchill to suggest that revolutionary fervour such as Hoskins' need not be restricted, that collective resistance, while not always successful, is none the less possible.

Throughout *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill uses numerous epic theatre devices to interrogate a historical class struggle from a new perspective, to explore intersecting systems and structures of oppression. Through such epic devices as episodic structure, social gests, minimal props and costumes, epic music, actors in full view of the audience, self-conscious narration, and doubling, Churchill makes explicit the connection between past and present. By linking socialist ideology with material conditions, Churchill explores the millenial element of "a revolution that didn't happen," and provides powerful images which resonate in contemporary societies poised on the brink of another millenium.

CHAPTER THREE

Oh nobody sings about it, but it happens all the time. (*Vinegar Tom*)

In *Vinegar Tom* (1976), as in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill uses numerous epic devices to offer historical explanations of repressive power, to engage in "the historical way" (97) of thinking identified by Bertolt Brecht, in "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (1957). Like Brecht, Churchill "want[s] to show the incident[s] as . . . unique historical one[s] . . . want[s] to demonstrate a custom which leads to conclusions about the entire structure of a society at a particular (transient) time" (98). Reexamining the custom of witchcraft from a socialist feminist perspective, Churchill engages in what Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls *revisionary mythopoesis*. In "Perceiving the Other-side of Everything: Tactics of Revisionary Mythopoesis" (1985), DuPlessis suggests that many contemporary women writers "re-write, reinterpret, or re-envision classical myths and other culturally resonant materials, such as biblical stories and folk tales" (105). In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill, like the women poets DuPlessis cites, simultaneously deconstructs a prior myth, in Churchill's case the mythology of witchcraft, and constructs a new story with a positive valence. The appropriation and revision of myth by Churchill and many of her contemporaries reflects both an awareness "that stories are ideologies that shape our sense of reality" (DuPlessis 112), and a determination to reformulate these ideologies, a necessary first step towards social

change. DuPlessis correctly identifies a major problem for women in Judeo-Christian myths: "[they] have constituted ideologies surrounding and defining women as evil, duplicitous, closer to nature, disallowed from speech, thought, or debate" (106-7). In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill interrogates and challenges gender stereotypes embodied in the mythology of witchcraft, and for her mythopoesis represents empowerment of, by, and for women.

Churchill wrote *Vinegar Tom* while in association with a women's theatre collective named Monstrous Regiment (after a sixteenth-century pamphlet by John Knox entitled "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women").[1] Although Churchill was simultaneously working with Joint Stock on *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, this was her first experience working with a purely feminist collective. Monstrous Regiment, like other theatre collectives influenced by Brechtian epic theory, functioned in an entirely collective manner in order to avoid individual leadership and hierarchies. Founded in 1975 following the Women's Theatre Festival held at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester, England, Monstrous Regiment was established by Gillian Hanna and Mary McCusker to provide opportunities for women in all areas of theatre. Although the company included some men, women assumed the major artistic and administrative positions. The initial impetus for *Vinegar Tom* was a shared interest in seventeenth-century witchcraft by Churchill and Monstrous Regiment.

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[1]Although most of my information concerning Monstrous Regiment comes from Catherine Itzin's *Stages in the Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1980), I would also direct the reader's attention to *Dreams and Deconstruction* (London: Amber Lane, 1980), edited by Sandy Craig; and *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook* (Buckingham: Open UP, 1993), edited by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones.

Indeed, even the play's title bespeaks this interest, as can be seen from the following program note to the production at Questors Theatre on March 1, 1987: "Vinegar Tom is the name of a cat-like beast depicted on a seventeenth-century engraving along with Matthew Hopkins, the famous . . . witch-finder. The head resembles a bull's (with horns), the body is elongated like a greyhound's and the tail is thin and extremely long" (Fitzsimmons 35). And yet in an interview with Linda Fitzsimmons on April 20, 1988, published in *File on Churchill* (1989), Churchill explains how her collaboration with Monstrous Regiment, resulting from their joint pre-occupation with the subject of witchcraft, finally culminates in a play not so much about witches, as about women:

> There was a meeting in which we talked about the fact that we were all thinking about witches, and they told me some of the books they'd read. I went off and read those and other books that I found. Then we met again, and we were all interested in women who were marginal to society being made scapegoats and seen as witches, rather than in witchcraft practices that might have been happening. (34)

In her Introduction to *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill explains that she deliberately made women, rather than witches, her primary concern: "the theory [underlying the play was] that witchcraft existed in the minds of its persecutors, that 'witches' were a scapegoat in times of stress like Jews and blacks" (129). Also, in an interview with Maggie Rose, published under the title "A Woman's Point of View" (1987), Churchill explains that her play is meant to be read as a reflection of women's lived reality: "*Vinegar Tom* is a play about witches, but none of the characters portrayed is a witch; it's a play which doesn't talk about hysteria, evil or demonic possession but about poverty, humiliation

and prejudice, and the view which the women accused of witchcraft had of themselves" (99). Churchill uses seventeenth-century witchcraft, then, as her point of entry into the project of revisionary mythopoesis, a project that not only empowers her to rewrite history, but to write *herstory*, to [re]write the stories of women.[2]

However, more than a common interest in witchcraft and feminism attracted Churchill to Monstrous Regiment. Her attraction to this feminist collective can best be understood in light of Catherine Itzin's description, in *Stages in the Revolution*, of its founding members: "The women were first and foremost committed feminists, but they were also committed socialists (three members of the company until 1978 were members of the Communist Party) and both perspectives informed their aims as a theatre company" (274). As a socialist feminist, Churchill could readily identify with Monstrous Regiment's political agenda as articulated by one of the company's earliest members, Susan Todd:

> We see ourselves not as seeking to reproduce bourgeois ideology, but to undermine it, to challenge it . . . the personal is political. . . . In Monstrous Regiment we are engaged in trying to shift consciousness in the area of women's relation to society . . . . in experimentation with old forms and a search for new ones, which integrate with and reflect our perception of the world as women, and the often very dislocated nature

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[2]Many feminists have adopted the term *herstory* to signify the human story as told about and by women. Casey Miller and Kate Swift, co-authors of *Words and Women: New Language in New Times* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), explain the feminist strategy underlying the use of the term: "When women in the movement use *herstory*, their purpose is to emphasize that women's lives, deeds, and participation in human affairs have been neglected or undervalued in standard histories" (135).

of women's experience now. (Itzen 274)

In *Vinegar Tom*, this experimentation with new forms manifests itself in the strategic deployment of various epic theatre devices, including cross-casting, social gestus, and songs that disrupt the flow of the action. The inherently political nature of Brechtian epic theatre enabled Churchill and Monstrous Regiment to explore the mythology of witchcraft from a socialist feminist perspective or, in the words of Susan Todd, "in terms of the economic pressures and the role of women in society" (Itzen 275).

Although Churchill uses fewer Brechtian epic devices in *Vinegar Tom* than she did in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, the ones she uses are most effective. One such device consists of seven songs that interrupt the flow of the action. In "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949), Brecht explains the efficacy of songs as alienation effects:

> It emphasizes the general gest of showing, which always underlies that which is being shown, when the audience is musically addressed by means of songs. Because of this, the actors ought not to 'drop into' song, but should clearly mark it off from the rest of the text; and this is best reinforced by a few theatrical methods such as changing the lighting or inserting a title. For its part, the music must strongly resist the smooth incorporation which is generally expected of it and turns it into an unthinking slavery. Music does not 'accompany' except in the form of comment. (203)

In her production note, Churchill explains how the songs in *Vinegar Tom* can best work as alienation effects that comment upon the action in the play: "The songs, which are

contemporary, should if possible be sung by actors in modern dress. They are not part of the action and not sung by the characters in the scenes before them . . . . it is essential that the actors are not in character when they sing the songs" (133). Churchill's innovative theatrical method of having the singers change from seventeenth-century to contemporary costumes interferes with the smooth incorporation of songs expected by audiences of traditional drama. In "Feminism and Theatre" (1978), Gillian Hanna, one of Monstrous Regiment's founding members, explains how such disruption enables the audience to make comparisons between the historical events described in the play and contemporary history, comparisons which suggest possibilities for intervention and change:

> We had a very real feeling that we didn't want to allow the audience to get off the hook by regarding it as a period piece, a piece of very interesting history. I believe that the simple telling of the historical story, say, is not enough. . . . You have to choose between what you keep in and what you leave out. It's at that point of choice where women on the whole find that they get left out. Our experience is that life is not the simple story, and that you have to find some way of recognizing that in dramatic form. (10-11)

Like Brecht, who views music as "an active collaborator" that gives the spectators "a chance to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view" (86), Churchill and Monstrous Regiment refuse to allow the audience "to get off the hook." As all epic dramatists, their primary agenda is to instruct the audience so as to effect social change. As Susan Todd explains, the songs work as alienation effects by inhibiting the

audience's empathy, thereby opening them up to the play's didactic message: "We didn't want to allow the audience to ever get completely immersed in the stories of the women in the play. We wanted to make them continually aware of our presence, of our relationship to the material, which was combative, anguished. The songs had to contain what we sensed as a connection between the past of the play and our present experience" (Itzen 276). Using the songs as alienation effects, which influence the audience's perception of the events of the narrative, Churchill correlates the treatment of the women derogated as witches within the play to the usual treatment of women within patriarchy. The juxtaposition of the songs and the rest of the play demonstrates that the root causes of misogyny still exist today, and that these roots permeate cultural values and institutions. Because drama remains a powerful productive force that constitutes and circulates ideologies that inform sexual stereotypes, Churchill's strategic use of Brechtian epic songs enables her to incorporate a materialist critique within her play.

Through the Brechtian epic songs, Churchill lays bare the textual strategies employed in the construction of witches, and by extension, in the social construction of women. The song "If You Float," for example, proclaims women's inescapable place within patriarchy to be a no-win situation: "If you float you're a witch / . . . / If you sink, then you're dead anyway" (170). If witch is read as a metaphor for woman, the audience can discover that regardless of a woman's stereotypical representation, whether "a mother, a child or a whore" (170), within patriarchy women are derogated in relation to the males of their class or social group. Churchill, like many contemporary feminists, identifies the silencing of women as an inescapable outcome of patriarchy: "Deny it you're bad / Admit it you're mad / Say nothing at all / They'll damn you to

hell" (170). Churchill, effectively demonstrating how women's speech is characterized within patriarchy as either bad or mad, extends her analysis to suggest that even if women accept their enforced silence and say nothing at all, they remain at the mercy of the patriarchy. Both silence and speech become the grounds for condemnation. Masculine power damns all women to the hell of patriarchy, the play suggests, in which "fingers are pointed" (170) and compliant women are displaced to the margins of society while non-compliant women are subjected to genocide or might we say gynocide.[3]

In her article, DuPlessis discloses tactics of revisionary mythopoesis whereby this displacement of women can be countered. She recommends

> displacement of attention to the other side of the story, or a delegitimation of the known tale, a critique even unto sequences and priorities of narrative. Narrative displacement is like breaking the sentence, because it offers the possibility of speech to the female in the case, giving voice to the muted. Narrative delegitimation "breaks the sequence"; a realignment that puts the last first and the first last has always ruptured conventional morality, politics and narrative.
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> Displacement is a committed identification with Otherness — a participant observer's investigation of the claims of those parts of culture and personality that are taboo, despised, marginalized. (108)

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[3]In *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), Andrea Dworkin defines gynocide as "the systematic crippling, raping, and/or killing of women by men," and she argues that "We must finally understand that under patriarchy gynocide is the ongoing reality of life lived by women" (19).

Churchill engages in just such displacement; she gives the witches, silent and silenced throughout history, a voice with which to articulate their tales from the margins in a context in which there is a reasonable chance of them being heard, given that the audience members have committed both time and money for the opportunity of listening. Like many contemporary feminists, Churchill makes women's subjectivity the site of the redefinition of patriarchal meaning and values, and she offers women new modes of subjectivity and opens up the possibility of political resistance and change. Churchill's epic songs in *Vinegar Tom* effect narrative delegitimation because they, unlike bourgeois theatre which seeks always to smooth over contradictions, disrupt the sequence of the narrative and give voice to the muted. Through the songs, Churchill shifts the focus so that her play about individual witches becomes the universal story of women within patriarchy.

The song "If You Float" allows the company to make connections between the experiences of Ellen, the thirty-five year old cunning woman accused of witchcraft, and the common oppression of women under patriarchy. The song immediately follows Ellen's final monologue:

> I could ask to be swum. They think the water won't keep a witch in, for Christ's baptism sake, so if a woman floats she's a witch. And if she sinks they have to let her go. I could sink. Any fool can sink. It's how to sink without drowning. It's whether they get you out. No, why should I ask to be half drowned? I've done nothing. I'll explain to them what I do. It's healing, not harm. There's no devil in it. If I can keep calm and explain it, they can't hurt me. (169-70)

Condemned because she possesses "powers . . . for healing or hurt" (155) which pose a danger to the male hierarchy. Ellen frantically attempts to negotiate an impossible situation, to sink without drowning. Witchfinder Packer articulates the danger Ellen poses when he says, "These cunning women are worst of all. Everyone hates witches who do harm but good witches they go to for help and come into the devil's power without knowing it. The infection will spread to the whole country if we don't stop it" (167). Such power in women, characterized by Packer as infection, represents an inversion of the gendered patriarchal binary opposition disempowered women/ empowered men, and cannot go unpunished. Interestingly, through Ellen, Churchill reverses another patriarchal binary opposition as well. When Jack, a local farmer, consults Ellen about his imagined emasculation at the hands of his neighbour, Alice, he is completely governed by passion. Ellen, meanwhile, remains calm and rational. Her rationality, her belief in the power of reason over emotion, ultimately culminates in her death because the male authorities are governed by witchcraft hysteria. In their history of women healers entitled *Witches Midwives and Nurses* (1973), Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English argue that witch-healers, women like Ellen, were among the first empiricists:

> The witch-healer's methods were as great a threat (to the Catholic Church, if not the Protestant) as her results, for the witch was one of the first empiricists: She relied on her senses rather than on faith or doctrine, she believed in trial and error, cause and effect. Her attitude was not religiously passive, but actively inquiring. She trusted her ability to find ways to deal with diseases, pregnancy and childbirth — whether through

medication or charms. In short, her magic was the science of her time.

(14)

Ellen's final assertion, then, "I've done nothing. I'll explain to them . . . If I keep calm and explain it they can't hurt me" (169-70), while reflecting her indomitable spirit, powerfully demonstrates that female rationality ultimately becomes powerless in the face of masculine emotionality and gynophobic prejudice. The song "If You Float" allows Churchill and the company to draw parallels between Ellen's desperate attempt to find a logical alternative to the binary of sink or swim and the no-win situation faced by all women under patriarchal domination.

Another song, "Oh Doctor," allows Churchill to connect Betty's horrendous experience with a seventeenth-century doctor to the enforced passivity of contemporary women in relation to the male medical establishment. Betty, the youngest woman in the play, is in danger of being accused of witchcraft because of her rebellion against patriarchal authority. Because of her social status as the land-owner's daughter, however, her refusal to acquiesce in an arranged marriage becomes constructed as sickness rather than rebellion. As Ehrenreich and English explain, "there was a double standard at work, for the Church was not against medical care for the upper classes. The real issue was control: Male upper class healing under the auspices of the Church was acceptable, female healing as part of a peasant subculture was not" (13). Betty, interpellated[4] by the doctor's diagnosis of her alleged illness, by his pathologizing of

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[4]My use of the term interpellation is informed by Louis Althusser's "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971) in which Althusser argues that the interpellation of individuals as subjects is a structural feature of all ideology. Althusser defines interpellation as "that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday

female resistance to oppressive gender ideology, becomes convinced of her own illness and tells Ellen, "But the doctor says he'll save me. He says I'm not a witch, he says I'm ill. He says I'm his patient so I can't be a witch" (169). The constant reiteration of *he says* becomes a refrain or chant in which the authority of her familial patriarch is replaced by the patriarchal authority of the doctor. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Michel Foucault suggests that from the eighteenth century onwards, women's bodies became subject to and were given meaning by modern science through the three-fold process of *hysterization*, and he identifies one of these processes as the means "whereby it [the feminine body] was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it" (104).[5] This process becomes obvious in Scene Six, when the doctor pontificates on female hysteria as he bleeds Betty: "Hysteria is a woman's weakness. Hysteron, Greek, the womb. Excess blood causes an imbalance in the humours. The noxious gases that form inwardly every month rise to the brain and cause behaviour quite contrary to the patient's real feeling" (149). The doctor codifies female menstruation as the noxious root cause of female weakness. During menstruation, the

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police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (162-63).

[5]Foucault identifies the other two processes of *hysterization* as follows: the process "whereby the feminine body was analyzed — qualified and disqualified — as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; . . . [and the process] whereby, finally, it was placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element), and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education): the Mother, with her negative image of "nervous woman," constituted the most visible form of this hysterization" (104). Churchill, aware of the ways in which the nature of the female body becomes central to the patriarchal subjection and social marginalization of women, uses her plays to expose, challenge, and disrupt this three-fold process.

doctor suggests, men know better than women what women are really feeling. Churchill, breaking with the taboo prohibiting discussions of menstruation, presents this bleeding scene in order to ask, like Shoshana Felman in "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy" (1975),

> Is it by chance that hysteria (significantly derived, as is well known from the Greek word for "uterus") was originally conceived as an exclusive female complaint, as the lot and *prerogative* of women? And is it by chance that even today, between women and madness, sociological statistics establish a privileged relation and a definite correlation? (2)

Through the bleeding of Betty, Churchill represents a concrete example of *hysterization*, but she extends her analysis to demonstrate the effect of this process on women themselves. Betty's final capitulation to the marriage results from her suspicion that "maybe I've been bewitched. If the witches are stopped, maybe I'll get well" (169). Betty internalizes the continual patriarchal definition of her alleged illness so that finally she agrees to a marriage that will be only slightly less painful than the torture experienced by the other women in the play. That this class difference exists at all, however, signals Churchill's commitment to the socialist dimension of socialist feminism.

By preceding and succeeding the bleeding scene with the song "Oh Doctor," Churchill engages in the primary function of epic theatre, didacticism, and connects the dangerous and abusive medical practices of Betty's seventeenth-century doctor to the intrusive and often insensitive medical practices of contemporary male doctors. The singer, who only wants her body back so that she might "see herself," feels that her body

has been appropriated by the male physician. In his hands, the speculum used in vaginal examinations becomes an extension of the doctor himself: "Stop looking up me with your metal eye. / Stop cutting me apart before I die" (150).[6] Such masculine intrusions into the female body culminate in feelings of worthlessness and self-doubt; the singer asks not once but four times: "What's wrong with me the way I am?" (149-50). By linking the song "Oh Doctor" to Betty's experiences, Churchill explores the ways in which the male medical profession continues to subordinate women and, consequently, she answers Shoshana Felman's questions about whether women are pathologized by chance with a resounding "NO!"

Another song, "Nobody Sings," immediately follows Scene Three, the scene in which Alice, a twenty-something unwed mother and social outcast, and her mother, Joan, frankly discuss sex and the absence of men in their lives. The song, which details the full gamut of the women's reproductive history, from the onset of menstruation to menopause and aging, attempts to break the taboo surrounding female reproductive sexuality. Although the song reiterates the fact that "nobody sings about it" (141-42), the actors for whom Churchill provides the lyrics do in fact sing about it. Through this song, Churchill connects the individual oppression experienced by Joan and Alice to the dilemma facing many contemporary women as they approach middle age. In her cast of characters, Churchill, as she does in most of her plays, makes a point of listing

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[6]Luce Irigaray, in her well-known *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), uses the image of the speculum, a male instrument for the penetration of women, to discuss how women constitute the silent ground upon which patriarchal theorists erect their discursive constructs. Toril Moi's *Sexual / Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), in a chapter entitled "Patriarchal reflections: Luce Irigaray's looking-glass" (127-149) provides an interesting discussion of Irigaray's critical theory.

everyone's age. Her emphasis on the diversity of ages, like the song itself, reflects the continuity of women's oppression, which "happens all the time" (142). While young women like Alice receive their definition from a patriarchy "blinded by [their] beauty," the older women's definition comes from a patriarchy "blinded by [their] age" (142). Nowhere are the stereotypes about aging more apparent than in the fifty-year-old Joan, who is variously defined as "dirty *old* woman" (144), ungrateful *old* hag" (148), and finally "such a stinking *old* witch" (173) [emphasis mine]. When she tells Packer she should not be hanged as a witch because she is "with child," Joan demonstrates her perhaps unconscious awareness that within patriarchy women's value lies largely in their ability to procreate. Because she is so obviously past the child-bearing years, and consequently seen as valueless, Goody's mocking response, "Who'd believe that?" (174) forcefully illustrates how aging in women becomes just another ground for female oppression.

Age is not the sole determinant of Joan's fate, however. Churchill insists on constructing Joan's part from what Brecht calls "a social point of view" (100). In "Notes to Die Rundköpfe und Die Spitzköpfe" (1957), Brecht suggests that in epic theatre "the modes of behaviour shown by the actors had transparent motives of a social-historical sort. It was not the 'eternally human' that was supposed to emerge . . ." (100). Like Alice's, Joan's social and economic marginalization results from lack of male attachments. In her statement to Alice in Scene Three, that "If we'd each got a man we'd be better off" (141), Joan acknowledges that she and Alice, precisely because they are outside patriarchal control, are more likely than women who have husbands and fathers to be subject to persecution as witches. Joan, declaring she would be better off

with a man, despite the fact that her husband "used to beat [her]" (141), voices the powerlessness many women experience within patriarchy. Her admission of witchcraft can thus be read as an attempt to appropriate a modicum of power from a society in which female powerlessness is a structural feature. Her statement to Packer that "the great storm and tempest comes when I call it and strikes down trees. But now I'm in prison my power's all gone or I'd call down thunder and twist your guts" (173-74) represents little more than wishful thinking. Joan, powerless in the face of masculine hegemony and force, finally accepts Packer's definition of her as a witch.

Alice, however, refuses to accept male definitions of herself. In the play's first scene, after the Man has enjoyed sex with Alice, he calls her a whore. Churchill's description of the Man as *a gentleman*, while signifying his social class, is meant to be read ironically in light of his most ungentlemanly behaviour towards Alice. When Alice denies the appellation of whore, the man says, "What are you then? What name would you put to yourself? You're not a wife or a widow. You're not a virgin. Tell me a name for what you are" (137). Interestingly, Alice avoids answering by changing the subject. Because she does not fall within the stereotypical modes of naming or representation of women within patriarchy, those of wife, widow, virgin, or whore, she is at a loss how to answer except by refusing the subject position patriarchal language prescribes for her. Muriel R. Schulz, in "The Semantic Derogation of Woman" (1975), explains that "language reflects the thoughts, attitudes, and culture of the people who make it and use it" (64), and she demonstrates that, at least until the present generation, the inheritors of Adam's task of naming things have been other men: "That men are the primary creators and users of the English language generally follows from the primary

role they have traditionally played in English-speaking cultures. They have created our art, literature, science, philosophy, and education, as well as the language which describes and manipulates these areas of culture" (64). Alice's inability to articulate her positioning within the patriarchy's available frame of reference, then, results in more power for the Man, who concludes his definition of her as "whore, whore, damned strumpet, succubus, witch" (137). The Man, never given a name by Churchill, comes to represent the voice of masculine power and authority, and his final definition of Alice as witch becomes absorbed and sustained by almost everyone in the play. And yet Alice remains aware of the unfair position of women within patriarchy. Unlike her friend Susan, she refuses to see her actions as a sin against either God or man. She tells the Man, "Any time I'm happy someone says it's a sin" (136). After her mother's death and her own condemnation, Alice remains true to her own self-definition. She assures Susan that Joan "wouldn't know how" to be a witch, and she once again affirms, "I'm not a witch." Like the singer in "Nobody Sings," Alice becomes filled with rage as she goes on to say, "But I wish I was. If I could live I'd be a witch now after what they've done. I'd make wax men and melt them on a slow fire. . . . There's no way for us except by the devil. If only I did have magic, I'd make them feel it" (175). Because men, the *them* of her speech, arrogate to themselves the status of gods, Alice embraces antithetical supernatural power as the only way for women, the *us* of whom she speaks. Her final words, while demonstrating an indomitable female spirit which challenges and rejects masculine definitions and representations, ultimately make explicit the powerlessness of women within seventeenth-century English patriarchy. By connecting Alice and her mother to the song "Nobody Sings," Churchill connects seventeenth-

century witch hunts to twentieth-century ageism grounded in gender and directed against women.

Churchill uses the song "Lament for the Witches" to connect the overt oppression experienced by Susan, the only married woman accused of witchcraft, to the covert oppression of women in contemporary society. The song begins by asking, "Where have the witches gone? / Who are the witches now?" (175). The explicit answer to both questions, "Here we are" (175), sung by women in contemporary dress, sustains the metaphor of women as scapegoats introduced in "Something to Burn," wherein witch-hunting is placed in the context of genocide, slavery, and the holocaust: "It's blacks and it's women and often it's Jews" (154). The singers of the "Lament for the Witches" address a presumably female audience directly and challenge them to inquire whether they too would have been hanged as witches had they lived in the seventeenth-century:

> Look in the mirror tonight.
>
> Would they have hanged you then?
>
> Ask how they're stopping you now.
>
> Where have the witches gone?
>
> Ask how they're stopping you now.
>
> Here we are. (176)

Twice exhorting the audience to "Ask how they're stopping you now," the singers encourage women to connect the covert contemporary methods of suppression and control to the extreme, overt forms of discipline and punishment used to dominate and suppress women in the seventeenth-century. The song's description of the "desperate

witches / with no way out but the other side of hell" (176) accurately reflects the situation in which Susan unwittingly finds herself. Like Churchill, who during the 1960s experienced numerous miscarriages and childbirths, Susan experiences life as little more than a series of pregnancies. Though still in her early twenties, Susan already has two children and is pregnant with a third. Her agony is justified as God's will by her "wonderful" husband, who "doesn't beat [her]". As she tells Alice, "I complained last time after churching, and he said I must think on Eve who brought the sin into the world that got me pregnant. I must think on how woman tempts man, and how she pays God with her pain having the baby. So if we try to get round the pain, we're going against God" (146). Churchill captures the misogynist Christian doctrine long used by men to dominate and subjugate women. In this speech Churchill exposes a practice feminists have long desired to end, that of blaming the victim. Women's pain and suffering are justified both historically and biblically, while men escape all blame, even for the act of getting women pregnant. Susan's trial and subsequent sentence result from her failure to fulfill her duties as a commodity of exchange in the agreement of matrimony. Her abortion and the death of her child represent a crime against the property of her husband, which, as Packer suggests, "is a grievous offence" (167). Not surprisingly then, given the weight of male authorities aligned against her, Susan, like Betty, absorbs and accepts male definitions. After her condemnation, she tells Alice: "I was a witch and never knew it. I killed my babies. . . . I'm so wicked. Alice, let's pray to God we won't be damned. If we're hanged, we're saved" (174). Churchill effectively demonstrates the power of patriarchy to elicit the assent of almost everyone, even those victimized by the system. Susan embraces death as the means whereby her

alleged sin of being born female can finally be expunged.

Churchill's analysis of the muted story includes the oppression of those women not accused of witchcraft. Margery's life, like those of many women in the play, is solitary and debased, but she is never in danger of hanging because she succeeds in suppressing her anguish and maintaining her expected role, a role for women boldly stated, and thrice repeated, in the song at the end of Scene Twelve, "If Everybody Worked as Hard as Me": "Oh, the country's what it is because / the family's what it is because / the wife is what she is / to her man" (160-1). In this song, Churchill demonstrates how the suppression of women in patriarchal marriage is fundamental to the existing social order, be it in seventeenth- or twentieth-century patriarchy. The future of the whole country rests upon the wife's submission to her man. Incorporated in the wife's submission to her husband is the silencing of women: "Nobody loves you / unless you keep your mouth shut" (160). Notice that the woman's definition derives from her relationship to the man; she is defined solely by her role as his wife, while he retains the full autonomy and independence associated with *man*hood. Because the man emerges as the fulcrum upon which the good of the country depends, families without a man, families like that of Alice and Joan, are automatically excluded from the category of family. And yet, as Churchill demonstrates, women pay an extremely high price for inclusion into the existing social order, a price made explicit in Margery's prayer while Joan and Ellen are hanged:

> Dear God, thank you for saving me. Let us live safe now. I have scrubbed the dairy out. You have shown your power in destroying the wicked, and you show it in blessing the good. You have helped me in

my struggle against the witches, help me in my daily struggle. Help me work harder and our good harvests will be to your glory. Bless Miss Betty's marriage and let her live happy. Bless Jack and keep him safe from evil and let him love me and give us the land, amen. (174)

Margery lives a life of daily struggle in which she works harder and harder to retain her unfaithful husband's love. Her request for a blessing upon Betty's marriage, ironic in light of her awareness of Betty's resistance to it, reveals her refusal to acknowledge and thus to confront the inequities of gender and class that govern her life. Women like Margery willingly acquiesce to the status quo in order to survive, and for Churchill, the survival of women, and the means whereby this survival is achieved, become an integral part of the play. Patriarchal power sometimes forces women to commit treason against other women in order to survive, and while such treason cannot be justified, Churchill refuses to condemn these women without exploring the ideologies which have structured and conditioned women's lives, and which continue to do so. For this reason, Goody's story, like Margery's, must be heard.

While Churchill uses the epic song "If Everybody Worked as Hard as Me" to comment on Margery's actions, she uses a different Brechtian epic device to explore Goody's conspicuous disloyalty to her sex. In "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" (1957), Brecht suggests that his friend, German novelist Alfred Döblin, "provided an excellent criterion when he said that with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life" (70). Goody's monologue in Scene Fifteen seems to have been deliberately cut from the previous scene in just such a manner. Although set

in the same public square as the previous scene, and in some ways merely a continuation of that scene, one in which women are tortured in an attempt to elicit their confessions. Goody's monologue is separated by Churchill into a scene of its own. While the torture continues with Packer pulling up Susan's skirt in an effort to find "the place on the body of the witch made insensitive to pain by the devil" (165), Goody utters a long monologue full of violent imagery in which she decries the inefficient modes of torture available in England. Goody takes obvious pride in her association with Henry Packer, "a fine skillful man" (168) who "insists" that she receive the same wage as he. Proclaiming her allegiance to and identification with the all-powerful Packer, who daily exercises life-and-death decisions over the women he encounters, Goody affirms:

> Yes, it's interesting work being a searcher and nice to do good at the same time as earning a living. Better than staying home a widow. I'd end up like the old women you see, soft in the head and full of spite with their muttering and spells. I keep healthy keeping the country healthy. It's an honour to work with a great professional. (168)

While Goody justifies her torture and murder of other women on the grounds of keeping the country healthy, it soon becomes apparent that she is primarily motivated by self-interest. A widow like Joan, Goody "keeps healthy," both physically and economically, by aligning herself with the oppressor rather than the oppressed group. Churchill separates Goody's monologue from the previous scene to demonstrate how women, in order to survive, are sometimes coerced into alienating themselves from other women, to become honorary men.

In the final scene of the play, Scene Twenty-One, Churchill uses cross-casting as

an alienation effect to provide a graphic illustration of women's alienation from their female selves. In this scene, Sprenger and Kramer demonstrate the kind of thinking that made the persecution of witches, and indeed of women, possible. Their claims about women come from *Malleus Maleficarum*, variously translated as *The Hammer of Witches* or *The Hammer of Witchcraft*. This work, co-authored by Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer in 1486, is the oldest extant handbook on European witchcraft.[7] In her Production Note for *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill urges:

> Kramer and Sprenger should be played by women. Originally they were played by Chris Bowler and Mary McCusker who, as Ellen and Joan, had just been hanged, which seems to be an ideal doubling. They played them as Edwardian music hall gents in hats and tails, and some opening rhymes and jokes are theirs. The rest of the scene is genuine Kramer and Spenger, from their handbook on witches and women, *Malleus Maleficarum, The Hammer of Witches*. (134)

The reason the cross-cast doubling seems ideal is two-fold: first, it draws attention to women's complicity, albeit unwitting, in their own and other women's oppression, and second, it may shock the audience into an awareness of the underlying misogyny that has become so invisible to the patriarchally dominated vision in many contemporary cultures. Playing Kramer and Sprenger as music hall gents, Bowler and McCusker satirize the logic regarding witches and women. These mock authority figures parody the kind of thinking that made witch-hunting possible.

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[7]For background information about the mythology of witchcraft, I found both E. William Monter's *European Witchcraft* (New York: Random, 1969) and Leo Bonfanti's *The Witchcraft Hysteria of 1692* (Wakefield, Mass.: Pride, 1971) extremely useful.

In her article on mythopoesis, DuPlessis identifies displacement as one tactic employed in non-feminist mythology, and she defines this displacement as "the denial of victimhood or the naming of fate or nature as its cause" (112). Although Brecht does not use the word displacement, he too argues against the naming of fate or nature as the cause of oppression. In paragraph thirty-eight of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949), Brecht insists that "the 'historical conditions' must of course not be imagined (nor will they be so constructed) as mysterious Powers (in the background); on the contrary, they are created and maintained by men (and will in due course be altered by them)" (190). Sprenger and Kramer, however, buttress their treatise with countless authorities, primarily Holy Scripture and the Lives of Saints and Martyrs, arguably two of the most powerful sources of misogyny in the West. Churchill's positioning of these fifteenth-century historical figures within the framework of her play set in the seventeenth-century and written in the twentieth-century dramatizes the continuity of the tactic of displacement. Sprenger and Kramer attempt to justify the persecution of witches on the grounds of what they say is natural female inferiority. They depend on gender stereotypes which masquerade as *a priori* sexual differences, which pretend to be what is natural, real, and eternal. Their answer to the repeated question, "Why is a greater number of witches found in the fragile feminine sex than in men?" (176-77), relies almost entirely upon patriarchal binary opposition. Asserting that women suffer from "a defect of intelligence" and "a defect of inordinate passions" (177), Sprenger and Kramer re-inscribe the head/heart, rational/emotional opposition that feminists have for so long attempted to re-envision. The question itself identifies the feminine with the weaker; women become the *fragile* feminine sex, while men remain just men. Sprenger

and Kramer use the comparative mode, "*more* credulous, *more* impressionable, feebl*er*" [emphasis added] (177), demonstrating that women are being defined in relation to someone else. Who that someone else is is obvious because Sprenger and Kramer admit their phallocentrism and say outright, "she is more carnal than a man" (177).

Churchill suggests that this mystification of women as insatiably carnal creatures who possess a dark, lustful power against which men must be ever vigilant continues today. The final scene with Sprenger and Kramer is immediately followed by the song "Evil Women," sung by the women actors dressed in contemporary costume. Whereas "Lament for the Witches" addresses the female members of the audience, "Evil Women" directly challenges the males in the audience, asking them if their projection of evil onto women results from a desire to mask their own sexual inadequacies:

Evil Women

Is that what you want?

Is that what you want to see?

On the movie screen

Of your own wet dream

Evil women.

If you like sex sinful, what you want is us.

. . .

Do you ever get afraid

You don't do it right?

Does your lady demand it

Three times a night?

If we don't say you're big

Do you start to shrink? (178)

Inherently evil women, the song suggests, are a male construct, a projection of male fantasy. Female sexuality, long associated with sinfulness by the Judeo-Christian religious establishment, results in masculine insecurity and castration anxiety, finally culminating in violence against women. By song's end, the "wet dream" becomes a "movie dream" wherein evil women "scream and scream" (179). Exploring the intricate linking between androcentric sexuality and violence against women in society, the song connects twentieth-century violent pornography to the misogynist sentiments expressed by Sprenger and Kramer and their ilk. But just as Churchill insists upon exploring the ideologies that condition women like Margery and Goody, so too she acknowledges that misogyny must be taught. Her song asks the men: "Did you learn you were dirty boys, did you learn / Women were wicked to make you burn?" (179). While misogyny cannot be justified, Churchill recognizes it as a learned response, which implies at least the possibility of its being unlearned. However, the fact that the play concludes with the violent imagery of screaming women suggests that Churchill is not optimistic about such a change occurring anytime soon.

Indeed, throughout her play Churchill presents numerous critical social gests to demonstrate how misogynist gender ideology has become culturally coded. In paragraphs sixty-six and sixty-seven of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949), Brecht explains how critical social gests provide a scene or episode with a material focus:

Each single incident has its basic gest: *Richard Gloster courts his*

> *victim's widow. The child's true mother is found by means of a chalk circle. God has a bet with the Devil for Dr Faustus's soul. Woyzeck buys a cheap knife in order to do his wife in,* etc. The grouping of the characters on the stage and the movements of the groups must be such that the necessary beauty is attained above all by the elegance with which the material conveying that gest is set out and laid bare to the understanding of the audience.
>
> . . . To this end it is best to agree to use titles like those in the preceding paragraph. The titles must include the social point, saying at the same time something about the kind of portrayal wanted . . . Shown thus, the particular and unrepeatable incident acquires a disconcerting look, because it appears as something general, something that has become a principle. As soon as we ask whether in fact it should have become such, or what about it should have done so, we are alienating the incident. (200-1)

Although Churchill does not provide them, titles similar to those Brecht mentions could precede specific episodes in *Vinegar Tom*. Because a particular social gestus is played out in each episode, titles like the following could be used: *A woman takes out her sexual frustration on a voodoo doll, A woman pretends to restore an emotionally distraught man's penis,* and *A woman churns butter which will not come.* The first two titles apply to incidents in the same scene, Scene Thirteen. Alice, in a parody of the divine creation, uses "wet mud . . . like clay" (162) to construct an effigy of the Man with whom she had sex in Scene One. Using a pin, Alice proceeds to prick the doll

"between the legs first so he can't get on with his lady. . . . [and] once in the head to drive him mad" (162-3). Although Susan is convinced that the doll gives Alice power over the Man's corporeal being, Alice recognizes the futility of her attempt to appropriate even symbolic power over the Man: "That's just words. . . . I did nothing. I never do anything. Might be better if I did" (163). Like Ellen, Alice recognizes that "If you won't do anything to help yourself you must stay as you are" (155). And yet, as the episode with the voodoo doll makes explicit, within patriarchy women may ritually appropriate the trappings of power, but power itself remains elusive, primarily restricted to the masculine sphere.

Through Margery's husband, Jack, Churchill provides an example of such masculine power grounded in physical strength. Jack, after unsuccessfully attempting to seduce Alice, accuses her of bewitching him and stealing his penis: "Give it me back. You know. You took it from me these three months. I've not been a man since. You bewitched me. You took it off me" (163). Blaming Alice for his impotence, Jack demonstrates the effects of the loss of what Andrea Dworkin calls *phallic identity*. In *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (1976), Dworkin defines phallic identity as follows: "A man's identity is located in his conception of himself as the possessor of a phallus; a man's worth is located in his *pride* in phallic identity. The main characteristic of phallic identity is that *worth* is entirely contingent on the possession of a phallus" (46). In the first scene, the Man demonstrates the kind of phallic pride of which Dworkin speaks. After sexual intercourse with Alice, he asks her, "Didn't the enormous size of me terrify you?" (135). Even Alice's naive response, "It seemed a fair size like other men's," fails to dissuade him of his delusion of

grandeur, and he twice demands "Didn't it hurt you? Are you saying it didn't hurt you?" (135). Deirdre English's "The Politics of Porn, Can Feminists Walk the Line?" (1980) helps explain the Man's insistence on his ability to hurt with his phallus. English suggests that since many men, especially those engaged in pornography, "remain sadly uninformed about how to pursue the female climax, a compulsive 'try-harder' approach flourishes, emphasizing penile length, strength and endurance . . . As the performance pressures on men intensify, porn answers with increasing force and sadism, as if to literally *make* women climax" (49). Sometimes, however, performance anxiety results in impotence. Having tried for three months to have sex with Alice, a woman who willingly sleeps with others, Jack tells her: "I'm no good to my wife. I can't do it. . . . It's only when I dream of you or like now talking to you . . . " (147). Eventually he loses entirely his ability to achieve an erection. Although Jack suggests that he accepts his impotence, his words to Ellen suggest otherwise:

> "Want to ask you something private. It's about my . . . [*He gestures, embarrassed.*] It's gone. I can't do anything with it, haven't for some time. I accepted that. But now it's not even there, it's completely gone. There's a girl bewitched me. . . . I've heard how witches sometimes get a whole boxful[8] and they move and stir by themselves like living creatures and the witch feeds them oats and hay. . . . I don't want a big one, I want my own back, and this witch has it. (158)

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[8]In *Malleus Maleficarum* (London: Pushkin, 1928) Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger discuss "seven methods by which they [witches] infect with witchcraft the venereal act and the conception of the womb," the third being "by removing the members accommodated to that act" (11). Jack's claims about Alice replicate the misogynist doctrine found in the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Jack, like those described in the song "Something to Burn," needs a scapegoat for his own failure and inadequacy. His embarrassment, his inability to even say the word penis, reflects his loss of phallic identity, according to Dworkin the source "of all personal, psychological, social, and institutionalized domination on this earth" (46). Because women lack a phallus, Jack endows Alice with one, namely his, so that he might repossess it by exercising his superior physical strength against her. In an attempt to reassert his dominance, Jack chokes Alice until she complies with his demands: "[ALICE *puts her hand between his thighs*.] ALICE: There. It's back. JACK: It is. It is back. Thank you, Alice. I wasn't sure you were a witch till then" (164). After forcing Alice to restore that which she never possessed, Jack uses her coerced acquiescence against her in labeling her a witch. Alice's social gest demonstrates the double-bind logic whereby innocent women could be accused and condemned as witches. This gest enables Churchill to explore how the personal lives of individual women like Alice derive meaning from the social and political context in which they occur, and to connect the historical past to the concrete present.

In Scene Four, Churchill provides another social gest in order to interrogate the issue of women's sexual and economic frustration. The scene begins and ends with Margery churning butter without results. As she churns, she repeatedly chants the following ditty: "Come butter come, come butter come. Johnny's standing at the gate waiting for a butter cake" (143), but the butter, a metaphor for female orgasm, fails to come. In this parody of heterosexual intercourse, Margery represents the man who, through stroking and words of encouragement, initially aids his partner in achieving a climax. However, this encouragement soon turns to anger and frustration: "It's not

coming this butter. I'm sick of it" (145), which finally culminates in a decision to "heat a horseshoe red hot and put it in the milk to make the butter come" (145). Through Margery's social gest, Churchill demonstrates that, as Deirdre English has suggested, male frustration with the length of time women take to reach orgasm often culminates in men's use of force and sadism in an effort literally to *make* women climax. Although on one level Margery represents the male partner, on another level she represents the female partner who is berated and abused for her failure to achieve orgasm. Blaming Margery for the butter's failure to come, Jack verbally abuses her throughout the scene, finally calling her a "lazy slut" (145). Churchill's choice of this particular insult is deliberately ironic. By calling her lazy, Jack undermines Margery's belief in her contribution to the existing social order through her hard work. Additionally, the word *slut*, originally referring to dirty, slovenly women, has become a sexist epithet used to refer to women who, because they have numerous sexual partners, are considered immoral. Jack's choice of the word *slut*, then, is particularly ironic in light of the fact that Margery's status as a monogamous wife is her primary protection against the accusation of witchcraft.

Churchill uses Margery's social gest to connect sexual and economic frustration. On the literal level, the butter represents a commodity in a market economy. Jack's abuse of Margery results from his concerns about their economic well-being. "Times are bad enough" (145), he tells her. As so often happens in the play, Margery's defense consists of blaming someone else, in this case Joan, for her adversity: " Butter won't come. Mother Noakes said damn the butter to hell" (145). Through Margery's one social gest, Churchill not only captures women's sexual and economic frustration, but

also demonstrates how this frustration can result in the oppression of other women. This lack of female solidarity will be taken up much more explicitly by Churchill in later plays such as *Top Girls* (1982) and *Fen* (1983).

In *Vinegar Tom*, however, Churchill engages in revisionary mythopoesis which, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis suggests, can be a useful "tool to transform hegemonic society and the tales it tells" (122). In her revisioning of the mythology of witchcraft, Churchill uses numerous Brechtian epic techniques to make connections between the personal experiences of individual women and the wider socio-political context of economic and sexual relations. Epic theatre's inherently political nature makes it an excellent vehicle for undermining and challenging bourgeois class ideology. Through her strategic deployment of epic devices such as social gests and songs, for example, Churchill shifts the audience's consciousness towards a socialist feminist perception of the world. In *Vinegar Tom*, as in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill offers historical explanations of repressive power, explanations of fundamental importance to feminists, because only with an understanding of gendered power relations can women begin political resistance. Her revised myth, *Vinegar Tom*, includes women in the [re]construction of their own history and represents a move toward female empowerment.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lady, give us back what we were, give us the history we haven't had.

make us the women we can't be. (Cloud Nine)

Churchill uses epic dramaturgy in *Cloud Nine* (1979) to explicate how, in the words of Michel Foucault, "sex is put into discourse" (11). In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One, An Introduction* (1981), Foucault analyzes how discourses of sexuality constitute and govern individuals as sexual subjects:

> What is at issue, briefly, is the overall 'discursive fact', the way in which sex is 'put into discourse'. Hence too, my main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behaviour, the paths that give it access to the rare or scarcely perceivable forms of desire, how it penetrates and controls everyday pleasure--all this entailing effects that may be those of refusal, blockage and invalidation, but also of incitement and intensification: in short, the 'polymorphous techniques of power'. (11)

Like Foucault, Churchill is concerned with how social power relations are produced and sustained in the discursive production of historically specific sexualities. By setting her *Cloud Nine* in Victorian times in the first act and in 1979 in the second, Churchill demonstrates that sexuality is historically and socially specific and that its meaning is a

site of constant struggle. Although sexuality, as a focal point in the construction of subjective identity, becomes a primary locus of power, it is often not understood as such. As Foucault explains, "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (86). What Churchill does in *Cloud Nine* then, is to unmask the hierarchical power relations behind gender constructs, and those of race and class in particular, in a collateral way to make visible the multiplicity of power relations focused in sexuality. Her dramatization of power in all its forms represents a "strategic codification" of the "points of resistance [which] are present everywhere in the power network [and which] traverse social stratification and individual unities" (Foucault 95-6). The historic specificity of *Cloud Nine* enables her to interrogate the ways in which, at different historical moments and in different social contexts, women and men identify with different modes of subjectivity, to question whose interests are thereby served, and to address and contest specific forms of power exercised within racist and classist patriarchal societies.

As she did with *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), Churchill wrote *Cloud Nine* in conjunction with the Joint Stock Theatre Collective, again under the directorship of Max Stafford-Clarke. In an interview with Judith Thurman, for her article entitled "The Playwright Who Makes You Laugh About Orgasm, Racism, Class Struggle, Homophobia, Woman-Hating, the British Empire, and the Irrepressible Strangeness of the Human Heart" (1982), Churchill explains that Stafford-Clark initially expressed some reservations about directing what he considered to be strictly a "woman's" play:

> One of the things I wanted very much to do in *Cloud 9* was to write a play about sexual politics that would *not* just be a woman's thing. I felt there were quite a few women's groups doing plays from that point of view. And gay groups. . . . There was nothing that also involved straight men. Max, the director, even said at the beginning, "Well, shouldn't you perhaps be doing this with a woman director?" He didn't see that it was his subject--that it was his subject as well. (54)

Clearly Churchill's concern lies with the ways in which discourses of sexuality govern all individuals, whether female or male, gay or straight. Her insistence that sexual politics are "not just a woman's thing" reflects a commitment to challenging ideologies of domination that permeate all levels of capitalist, patriarchal societies, be they based on gender, race, class, and/or sexual orientation. Her *Cloud Nine* is built upon a firm belief in sex-equality in human relations, in the common humanity of women and men.

Well before the script for *Cloud Nine* was written, a cast was chosen. As Judith Thurman suggests, actors were hired not only on the basis of theatrical experience, but on the basis of sexual orientation and experience as well. Once the cast had been selected, they, the playwright, and the director held intense three-week workshops which, as Michelene Wandor explains in "Free Collective Bargaining,"

> consist of an open and varied set of explorations. The company invite people to talk to the group (feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham, Julie [Covington, a cast member]'s mum, the woman caretaker of the rehearsal rooms); they do improvisations on sexual status and confidence--for example, people choose a card and if it has a high number have to play

> high sexual confidence in a scene. The individual roles of writer, director and performer are deliberately blurred to maximize participation; everyone is free to suggest and initiate areas of work, books to read, ideas to discuss. (14)

Initially, Julie Covington's mother and the woman caretaker, both elderly women, were somewhat hostile to the collective's project. In their opinion, the company was frivolously "spending Arts Council money to sit around and talk about sex" (Thurman 57). Over time, however, these women became active participants in the workshops. Indeed, as Churchill tells Thurman, the character of Betty in the second act was greatly influenced by Covington's mother who, when they got her talking about women "did say many of the lines [Churchill] later gave to Betty--that women spoil things for themselves with their emotions, that she didn't like women as much as men" (57). Similarly, the play's title comes from the woman caretaker's description of orgasm:

> . . . she came forward, voluntarily, with amazing braveness, and did what each of us had done in turn--which was to sit on a chair in front of everyone else, and talk about her childhood and her life. She had come from a large, poor family, had married at sixteen, and had had a very violent and unhappy marriage, with no pleasure from sex at all. . . . And after thirty years she had remarried. She told us in quite a bit of detail how she and her new husband gradually got their relationship together. Finally she said: "We may not do it as often as you young people, but when we have our organisms [sic], we're on Cloud Nine." (Thurman 57)

Clearly then, both these elderly women, by verbalizing their individual experiences of

sexuality, made a significant contribution to *Cloud Nine*. However, although personal experiences such as theirs were invaluable, the company also relied on more formal explorations, on various philosophical and literary texts. Among the texts chosen for study by the company were Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* because the company shared an interest in the similarities between colonial and sexual oppression. However, the workshops functioned not only as study sessions on texts, but as consciousness-raising sessions as well. Churchill explains to Judith Thurman how the workshops allowed members of the collective to forge an intimate relationship with the subject matter of the play and with each other. The entire company engaged in discussions about:

> childhoods and parents, . . . the way we got to be who we are. We tried to educate each other about our own lives. The gay men, for example, talked about certain aspects of their experience that the others had no idea about. We had a sort of envy for their casual encounters, their adventures. . . . Some of the women felt that the gay men were likely to be even more hostile and detached from them than the straight men. One of the gay men felt that he hadn't very much in common with the women. And the straight men, at the beginning, were incredibly silent. (54)

Any initial resistance or hostility was overcome, however, by these intense, intimate sessions, and soon an extraordinarily strong bond among company members and an equally strong feeling of personal investment developed. Indeed, Jim Hooper, the experienced actor who in the original production played Betty in the first act and Edward in the second, tells Michelene Wandor that he had "never felt so close to a play.

It is like a second skin" (15). Bertolt Brecht, in his "The German Drama: Pre-Hitler" (1936), suggests that such intensely personal, group consciousness-raising can be effectively used to create a politically engaged epic theatre. Speaking about his theatrical experiments with "a small staff of collaborators," Brecht explains the impact of the experiments on the members of the collective:

> we tried a type of theatrical performance that could influence the thinking of all the people engaged in it. We worked with different means and in different strata of society. These experiments were theatrical performances meant not so much for the spectator as for those who were engaged in the performance. It was, so to speak, art for the producer, not art for the consumer. (80)

Like Brecht's collaborators, the *Cloud Nine* company, by personally engaging in the play's creation, that is, in its conception and genesis, became equal partners in the dramatic process. Their personal contributions, their willingness to share intimate details about their private lives, helped to create an image of reality that became the raw material from which Churchill could draw when writing the play's script.

When the workshop ended, both Churchill and the rest of the company envisioned *Cloud Nine* as a modern play about contemporary relationships. Anthony Sher, an original cast member, discusses in Rob Ritchie's *The Joint Stock Book* (1987) how Churchill's original script "bore no direct resemblance to the workshop which had never dealt specifically with Victorian sexual politics. [Churchill] had obviously been inspired and nourished by the workshop, but had then taken a bold imaginative leap and used a different period and society to highlight the themes of sexual prejudice and role-

playing" (141). Churchill explains to Judith Thurman that a play about modern relationships seemed to her to lack dynamism: "it seemed very sort of static, a bit schematic, as if I'd worked out, illustrated, one of everything. God, how boring. It was a lovely moment when I had the idea for the first act, and I remember precisely where I was, walking along, when it came to me" (57). Churchill's comments do not, however, in anyway negate the contribution of the workshop. As she explains in a prologue to *Cloud Nine*: "Though the play's situations and characters were not developed in the workshop, it draws deeply on this material, and I wouldn't have written the same play without it" (245). So, although the idea of setting Act One in Victorian Africa reflects Churchill's unique vision and her ability to unearth and connect hierarchal power relations which transcend generations, it is also an idea made possible by the collective engagement of the Joint Stock company. [1]

One of the techniques Churchill uses most effectively to expose such hierarchal power relations in racist, capitalist, patriarchal societies is *cross-casting*. In paragraph fifty-nine of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949), Brecht urges his actors to "swap roles with their partners during rehearsal" because "it is good for the actors when they see their characters copied or portrayed in another form. If a part is played by somebody of the opposite sex the sex of the character will be more clearly brought out" (197). Although Brecht envisioned cross-casting as an acting exercise only, Churchill decided to switch actors along both gender and race lines in the staged production.

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[1]Although Churchill's representation of a geographically and culturally undifferentiated Africa could be construed as racist, it seems to me that the play's parodic, farcical structure requires a generic Africa as its setting. Her refusal to be specific reflects her desire to reveal how, to people like Clive and Harry, Africa *was* merely one "dark continent. Mysterious. Treacherous" (263).

Anthony Sher explains the effect of Churchill's decision:

> She had . . . devised a brilliant way of forcing the audience to challenge their own preconceptions as we had ourselves done during the workshop; she wrote into the cast-list that the wife, Betty, should be played by a man, the black servant played by a white, the son by a woman, and the daughter by a dummy which could be carelessly tossed around as the cute but negligible object the Victorians would regard a female offspring. (Ritchie 141)

Sher finds Churchill's innovation brilliant because it forces the audience to think, to challenge critically their own ideas and assumptions. He echoes Bertolt Brecht who, in *Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction* (1957), suggests that the spectators of epic drama "are no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play" (71). Certainly the visual incongruity of a man in the role of Clive's wife, for example, would tend to impede spectator identification and inhibit empathy. Churchill, through her cross-casting, heeds Brecht's advice to "t[ake] the subject matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding" (71). And as Churchill makes clear in her introduction to the play, the specific didactic message she wants understood is "the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression, which [Jean] Genet calls 'the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorised repression'" (245). By cross-casting her characters, Churchill questions the ways in which oppressed groups such as women and/or blacks repress, consciously, unconsciously, and subconsciously, those features which are incompatible

with the subjective identity imposed by the dominant group. Betty, for example, suppresses her desire for adventure and excitement because it is incompatible with Harry's idealised image of her as "safety and light and peace at home" (261). Churchill's cross-casting becomes a powerful visual reminder of the way subjects become constituted and governed by the exercise of control through their bodies. As Foucault explains:

> We . . . are in a society of 'sex', or rather a society 'with a sexuality': the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used. Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke *of* sexuality and *to* sexuality; the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object and a target. (147)

Like Foucault, Churchill makes the body central to her inquiry. She interrogates how bodies are given meaning and value, the historical and social "manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested" (Foucault 152). Her cross-casting, then, enables her to expose the power relations inherent in historically specific gender and, to a lesser extent, race and class relations. But as Churchill explained to Thurman, her innovation had a more practical, less esoteric origin as well: "it was also one of those dramatic inventions that are determined by circumstances. I was writing this play for a half dozen *white* people. There was no way I could suddenly get hold of a black actor. When I realized that this was not a disadvantage--that I could use it to make my point--it was an exciting moment" (57). While Churchill uses cross-casting as

an opportunity to challenge and subvert dominant, hegemonic notions of gender and race and their corresponding roles, one cannot but wonder why, in 1979's racially diverse Britain, the play's cast consisted entirely of white actors. Surely an integrated cast would have enhanced the intended didacticism of the cross-cast roles. In the absence of any explanation of why she could not get hold of a black actor and why hiring one would have to be done "suddenly," it seems fair to question her assertion.

Almost all the cross-casting occurs in the play's first act; only the role of Cathy is cross-cast in the second act. Cross-casting, with its constant visual tension between the character's personality and the actor's gender or race, helps explain how specific roles, whether personal, familial, social, or political, are learned. Act One, and indeed the entire play, examines the repressive effects of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), of what Churchill elsewhere calls 'softcops'.[2] Act One, set in a British colony in Africa in Victorian times and described by Churchill as "the male, patriarchal, heterosexual, empire building act with a galloping plot" (Fitzsimmons 48), centres on Clive, the white colonial administrator who acts as "father to the natives . . . and father to [his] family" (251). As the cast list for Act One provided by Churchill reveals, most of the other characters are defined in relation to him:

CLIVE, a colonial administrator

BETTY, *his* wife, played by a man

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[2]Although *Softcops* was not produced until 1984, Churchill wrote its first draft in 1978, before *Cloud Nine*. In the introduction to *Softcops*, Churchill explains that she wrote it after having read Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir [Discipline and Punish]* (New York: Random House, 1977). Like Foucault's text, *Softcops* is "about the soft methods of control" practiced by the likes of the family, schools, hospitals, churches, and social welfare workers.

JOSHUA, *his* black servant, played by a white

EDWARD, *his* son, played by a woman

VICTORIA, *his* daughter, a dummy

MAUD, *his* mother-in-law

ELLEN, Edward's governess

HARRY BAGLEY, an explorer

MRS. SAUNDERS, a widow (248) [emphasis added].

The use of the possessive pronoun constructs Clive, in Saussurean terms, as the *signified*, as the defining concept. The absence of the possessive pronoun in the description of Ellen, Harry, and Mrs. Saunders does not indicate their autonomy, however; Clive uses the possessive form to identify Ellen as Edward's governess, and as the play progresses the three receive their definition as Clive's employee, his friend, and his mistress respectively. Not surprisingly, as the signified, Clive is not cross-cast. As a white, middle-class, heterosexual male he would occupy a privileged position of power and autonomy within most capitalist, patriarchal societies of his day. Interestingly, in the original Royal Court production of *Cloud Nine* in 1979, Anthony Sher, who played Clive in Act One, also played Cathy in Act Two. Churchill, who "like[d] seeing Clive become Cathy" (247), had a three-fold motive for this singular instance of cross-casting in the second act:

> Cathy is played by a man, partly as a simple reversal of Edward being played by a woman, partly because the size and presence of a man on stage seemed appropriate to the emotional force of young children, and partly, as Edward, to show more clearly the issues involved in learning

what is considered correct behaviour for a girl. (246)

While Churchill refrains from cross-casting the character of Clive in order to instantiate his privileged position, doubling him with Cathy enables Churchill to makes concrete Simone de Beauvoir's well known assertion: *one is not born but becomes a woman.*[3] Because Cathy is the only character cross-cast in Act Two, Churchill suggests that while both females and males continue to be subjected to and interpellated by patriarchal ideology today, females are harmed by it in ways from which most males are exempt.

Nowhere is the role of the dominator in the social construction of gender made more obvious than in the character of Act One's Betty, played by a man "because she wants to be what men want her to be . . . [and because she] does not value herself as a woman" (245). After the Brechtian opening in the form of a song by the entire cast about "the sons of England," the play begins with Clive addressing the audience directly as he introduces his family and servants in a series of parodic rhyming couplets. By so doing, Clive engages in the kind of demonstration Brecht recommends in Paragraph fifty of his *A Short Organum for the Theatre* (1949) for the restriction of empathy: "Just as the actor no longer has to persuade the audience that it is the author's character and not himself that is standing on the stage, so also he need not pretend that the events taking place on the stage have never been rehearsed, and are now happening for the first and only time" (194). Clive's introductions and the other characters' responses to them, rendered through parodic verse, emerge as a carefully crafted, finely honed theatrical device which complements the cross-cast roles. For example, after being introduced by

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[3]Although Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1953) was written almost half a century ago, in many ways it is as apropos today, in this ostensible period of post-feminism, as it was when it was first written.

Clive: "My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be. / And everything she is she owes to me" (251). Betty steps forward as *his* creation and *his* possession. Although Betty's response makes explicit the subordinate role of the wife in Victorian marriage, the humour implicit in the scene is overwhelming. The seemingly absurd visual image of a male actor, dressed in Victorian women's clothing and reciting the following, can be almost farcical:

> I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life
>
> Is to be what he looks for in a wife.
>
> I am a man's creation as you see.
>
> And what men want is what I want to be. (251)

Betty, in her attempt to become what Clive wants in a wife, subsumes herself to the point that she becomes not only a man's creation but an absurd replica of the man himself. Similarly, the ludicrous image of the homophobic Clive holding the male Betty's hand while calling her "my little dove" (253) often inspires laughter in the audience. As Churchill explains in an interview with Lynne Truss, published under the title "A Fair Cop" (1987), the play's comic effect is largely visual: "Rehearsing the first act of *Cloud Nine* when we first did it, we thought oh, this is terribly funny, it's like a farce. It was much funnier than I'd realized writing it--I mean it had made me smile but it hadn't made me fall off my chair at all" (9). Churchill's cross-cast Betty becomes a kind of on-going sight gag, a perpetual parody of what men like Clive look for in a wife.

What Clive looks for in a wife becomes explicit in Scene Three of the first act when Clive engages with Betty in the kind of power relationship Foucault calls the

"confessional mode" (61). Although currently involved in an extramarital affair with Mrs. Saunders himself, Clive confronts Betty about her comparatively innocent kiss with Harry Bagley. Clive, acting as the interlocutor, represents "the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (Foucault 61-62). As the following demonstrates, the confession scene between Clive and Betty "is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject [Betty] is also the subject of the statement" (Foucault 61) while "the agency of domination resides in the one who questions [Clive]" (Foucault 62):

> CLIVE: I have never thought of you having the weakness of your sex, only the good qualities.
>
> BETTY: I am bad, bad, bad--
>
> CLIVE: You are thoughtless, Betty, that's all. Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men. The family protects us from that, you protect me from that. You are not that sort of woman. You are not unfaithful to me, Betty. I can't believe you are. It would hurt me so much to cast you off. That would be my duty.
>
> BETTY: No, no, no.
>
> CLIVE: Joshua has seen you kissing.
>
> BETTY: Forgive me.
>
> CLIVE: . . . It was a moment of passion such as women are too weak to resist. . . . We must resist this dark female lust, Betty, or it will swallow

us up.

BETTY: I do, I do resist. Help me. Forgive me.

CLIVE: Yes I do forgive you. But I can't feel the same about you as I did. You are still my wife and we still have duties to the household. (277-78)

Betty is made to endure Clive's discourse, his blatant misogyny expressed as a hypocritical compliment. He suggests that by virtue of her status as his wife Betty should be immune to such inherently female weaknesses as treachery and evil. Although he insists on inscribing stereotypical feminine frailty upon her, "You are so delicate and sensitive" (253), he also expects her to have the strength not only to resist temptation but to protect him from temptation as well. And what he needs protection from, it soon becomes apparent, is the temptation of a "dark female lust." Like Harry, who only sees Betty in terms of stereotyped roles which allow no place for autonomous individuals, "You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife" (268). Clive believes that women's sexuality can and must find expression in one of only two subject positions: Angel in the House or whore.[4] Just as he ascribes the former subjective identity to Betty, he ascribes the latter to Mrs. Saunders. In the second scene in Act One, after

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[4]Although the phrase Angel in the House seems to have originated from the title of a poem by Coventry Patmore, it is most often used in the context defined by Virginia Woolf in 1931 when she elaborated on Patmore's stereotypical character. According to Woolf, the *Angel in the House* "was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all, . . . she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel." For more information see Michèle Barrett's *Virginia Woolf: Women & Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1979).

having spent the previous night in her bed and just prior to performing cunnilingus while he masturbates under her skirt, Clive tells Mrs. Saunders: "You terrify me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous" (263). Calling Mrs. Saunders "dark like this continent," Clive replicates Hélène Cixous's formulation in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) of women within patriarchy as a dark continent. Although he admires Mrs. Saunders' "amazing spirit," as his frequent reiteration of the phrase demonstrates, she represents a danger to Clive because she threatens his notion of the family unit. Clive, who shares Harry's view that "the empire is one big happy family" (266), sees the nuclear family unit as the last bulwark against dangerous incursion. Clive's reference to Mrs. Saunders as a dark continent replicates his imperialistic attitude towards Africa itself: "But there is something dangerous. Implacable. This whole continent is my enemy. I am pitching my whole mind and will and reason and spirit against it to tame it, and I sometimes feel it will break over me and swallow me up" (277). Like Joseph Conrad's Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Clive sees Africa as an immense darkness, a darkness symbolizing the unknown, the impenetrable, the primitive, and the evil. In Clive's inverted view, the empire protects England from being "swallowed up" by the savage other, and the wife has a duty to protect her husband from being "swallowed up" by the gendered other.

In fact, as Clive suggests to Harry, a wife's protective duties extend even so far as to "save [men] from depravity" (283). Clive, who categorizes Harry's homosexuality as a "revolting perversion and a disease," and "a betrayal of the queen [which] can destroy the empire" (283), suggests marriage as the only possible means of Harry's salvation. The personal inclination of the prospective bride, be it Mrs. Saunders or

Ellen, is irrelevant to these men and, indeed, even to other women such as Betty and Maud. Telling the frightened lesbian bride, "Ellen, you're not getting married to enjoy yourself" (287), Betty demonstrates her internalization of Clive's exhortation to her in Act One, Scene One: "We are not in this country to enjoy ourselves" (253). Although she repeats the phrase back to him verbatim as if by rote several lines later, by Scene Five it becomes clear that Betty has internalized the ideology that assigns to women a life of self-abnegation. She proceeds to promote this ideology to other women, becoming simultaneously a victim and an agent of interpellation. Having a man play the role of Betty, then, enables Churchill to make immediately visible and explicit the historical and cultural role of men in the construction of female subjective identity.

Having a white male play Joshua, Clive's black servant, serves a similar purpose, only in relation to race rather than gender. After introducing Betty, Clive introduces Joshua with the following couplet: "My boy's a jewel. Really has the knack. / You'd hardly notice that the fellow's black" (251). While the juxtaposition of the pronoun 'my' with the racial epithet *boy* sums up Clive's possessive, paternalistic attitude towards Joshua, Joshua demonstrates his internalization of Clive's viewpoint when he responds:

> My skin is black but oh my soul is white.
>
> I hate my tribe. My master is my light.
>
> I only live for him. As you can see,
>
> What white men want is what I want to be. (251-52)

Joshua, oppressed because of race rather than gender, makes more explicit Betty's assertion so that her exclamation of "what men want is what I want to be" (251) becomes for him "what *white* men want is what I want to be." Joshua's hatred of and

alienation from his own people becomes obvious when, acting as Clive's minion, he spies upon, reports, and finally flogs his fellow Africans suspected of disloyalty. Distancing himself from them, he tells Mrs. Saunders that they are "Not my people, madame. . . . Bad people" (276). Joshua's repudiation of his own people extends even to his parents. Upon hearing about the death of his parents, Joshua reverts to tribal custom, "putting earth on his head" (284). However, when Clive offers him a day off to visit his family, Joshua responds, "Not my people, Sir. . . . My mother and father were bad people. . . . You are my father and mother" (284). Trying desperately to be what white men want him to be, Joshua attempts to eradicate all connections to his family, to eliminate his Africanness. Torn between two loyalties, to his family and to his white master, he can finally be loyal to neither. Act One ends with the image of Joshua "rais[ing] his gun to shoot Clive" (288), demonstrating the futility of Joshua's attempt to recreate himself in the image of his white master. Having a white actor play Joshua allows Churchill to make visible the way in which some people of colour, in an attempt to be accepted in white society, are often pressured into committing treason against their own people and themselves by adopting white attitudes and values. Her cross-casting along racial lines serves as an alienation effect which makes visible the "vicious circle" described by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "White men consider themselves superior to black men . . . Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" (10). This particular alienation effect, then, reminds the audience that within imperialistic, patriarchal societies, minorities sometimes "are unreal to themselves . . . have no sense of their own value -- have . . . taken on the identity given to them by a white man"

(Thurman 57). And yet, by juxtaposing Joshua with the other rebellious servants, Churchill leaves open the possibility of resistance. Although the rebellion has been suppressed, the audience realizes that this suppression is merely temporary. Indeed, Joshua's raising of the gun against Clive in the final scene of the act could be seen as the beginning of his reintegration with his fellow Africans.

An exchange between Edward and Joshua at the beginning of Scene Four in the first act makes explicit the futility of Joshua's attempted psychic self-effacement. When Edward asks Joshua to tell him "another bad story," Joshua relates the following creation myth:

> First there was nothing and then there was the great goddess. She was very large and she had golden eyes and she made the stars and the sun and the earth. But soon she was miserable and lonely and she cried like a great waterfall and her tears made all the rivers in the world. So the great spirit sent a terrible monster, a tree with hundreds of eyes and a long green tongue, and it came chasing after her and she jumped into a lake and the tree jumped in after her, and she jumped right up into the sky. And the tree couldn't follow, he was stuck in the mud. So he picked up a big handful of mud and he threw it at her, up among the stars, and it hit her on the head. And she fell down onto the earth into his arms and the ball of mud is the moon in the sky. And then they had children which is all of us. (279)

Joshua's tribal spirituality conflicts with the Christianity instilled in him by the imperialist colonizers. When no authority figure is around, Joshua often participates in

the oral traditions of his people, as Edward's request for another story attests. Because Joshua's story about the goddess is irreconcilable with the Christian creation myth as told in the book of Genesis, it is categorized as bad and must be told only in secret, when "nobody else is even awake yet" (279). Although clearly unable to eradicate totally his ancestral spirituality, Joshua repudiates it even as he reveals it. Immediately after telling Edward this story, Joshua reassures Edward: "Of course it's not true. It's a bad story. Adam and Eve is true. God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble" (280). Once again unconsciously engaging in interiorized repression, Joshua attempts to reject his African world view in favour of a white, Christian model that strengthens and sustains the systemic oppression of people of colour while it replaces the female as primogenitor with a male god in that role.

And yet, despite significant differences between the African and Christian creation stories, they both share one fundamental characteristic: an inherent misogyny. Although Joshua's story presents a goddess as the first creation and as the creator of the stars, sun, earth, and rivers, it also accepts as natural the physical and sexual assault upon the goddess by the tree monster. The great spirit exercises control over the goddess by sending forth the terrible [male] monster who uses physical force to subdue her. The monster hits the goddess on the head and presumably rapes her in order to have "children which is all of us." In addition, the imagery of the goddess falling down to earth from up among the stars evokes the misogynist prototype of the fallen woman within Christianity, Eve. Through the sexual imagery in each story, the phallic symbols of the "long green tongue" in Joshua's tale and the "snake" in the Christian myth,

Churchill reveals how religion often serves to oppress women and to construct them as the object of male desire. Although in Joshua's story the female goddess had to be subdued and in the Christian story Eve "liked the snake," in both cases the sexual imagery serves to justify the perception of women as weak and/or compliant objects of patriarchal subjection. Perhaps the fact that Eve liked the snake helps explain why she is held responsible for her fall, while no blame is attached to the goddess in Joshua's tale. Because Joshua, the black servant played by a white actor, relates both stories, Churchill suggests that despite similarities between gender and race oppression, hierarchies of power exist within both paradigms.

These hierarchies become explicit early in the first scene of Act One when Betty complains to Clive that Joshua "said something improper" (254) to her. When confronted by Clive, Joshua lies and suggests that Betty merely misinterpreted his innocent joke about his tired legs. While pretending to scold Joshua, Clive trivializes Betty's emotions: "Clive *winks at* Joshua, *unseen by* Betty" (255). This patriarchal hailing between Clive and Joshua exposes a solidarity between males which transcends racial boundaries. Not surprisingly, having received Clive's tacit approval to treat Betty with condescension and disrespect, Joshua reiterates his insult to Betty in the third scene of Act One: "You've got legs under that skirt. . . . And more than legs" (278). Joshua merely waits for Clive's absence before repeating his insult and revealing his misogyny.

Unfortunately for Joshua, he makes the mistake of insulting Betty in the presence of her son, Edward. Because Clive encourages Joshua's impudence towards Betty, Joshua feels confident that Edward will acquiesce as well:

BETTY: Edward, are you going to stand there and let a servant insult your mother?

EDWARD: Joshua, get my mother's thread.

JOSHUA: Oh little Eddy, playing at master. It's only a joke.

EDWARD: Don't speak to my mother like that again.

JOSHUA: Ladies have no sense of humour. You like a joke with Joshua.

EDWARD: You fetch her sewing at once, do you hear me? You move when I speak to you, boy.

JOSHUA: Yes sir, master Edward sir.

[JOSHUA *goes.*]

BETTY: Edward, you were wonderful.

[*She goes to embrace him but he moves away.*]

EDWARD: Don't touch me. (278)

After initiating the dispute between Edward and Joshua by calling upon Edward's protective instincts towards *his* mother, Betty retreats and the scene becomes a dialogue between the two males. Under-estimating racial and class solidarity and over-estimating gender solidarity, Joshua attempts to draw Edward into the so-called joke at the expense of the gendered other, ladies who allegedly have no sense of humour. Because Edward is only nine years old, Joshua treats him with adult condescension, calling him "little Eddy" and derogating his authority as "playing at master." Joshua fails to recognize that just as he has been interpellated by Clive's misogyny, so too has Edward been interpellated by Clive's racism and the patriarchal ideology of idealized Motherhood. Replicating the language of his father, Edward concludes the discussion by shouting at

Joshua and calling him *boy*. Once Edward exerts his racial authority, "little Eddie" suddenly becomes "master Edward sir." Ironically, when Betty attempts to express her gratitude, Edward recoils from her touch. To Edward's mind, Betty as the Mother exists only as an ideal, in both senses of the word, as a person considered to represent perfection, but also as something existing only as an idea. The flesh and blood Betty leaves him cold and recoiling with revulsion. Having been taught by Clive to "[n]ever mind the women" (257), to disrespect and shun them, Edward fears the contagion of his mother's female touch. The alienation effect of the cross-cast Betty and Edward serves to accentuate the irony of the duality of Edward's emotions: veneration of the mother but contempt for the woman. The Brechtian epic device which concludes the scene, a song by the entire cast entitled "A Boy's Best Friend [is his mother]," becomes "an active collaborator in the stripping bare of the middle class corpus of ideas" (Brecht 86). Through this song, Churchill reminds the audience of the hierarchical relations of power at work within imperialist, capitalist patriarchy. Just as in the final analysis Churchill's play suggests black men can occupy a privileged position of power in relation to women but not in relation to white male children, so too the drama shows that as they grow up, male children increasingly dominate over all females, even adults.

The privilege enjoyed by men in the family unit, be it as husband, father, or son, is something males learn to expect from an early age. Clive's introductory couplet, "My son is young. I'm doing all I can / To teach him to grow up to be a man" (252), makes explicit the role of education in gender acquisition. In an effort to instruct Edward about the privileged status he will one day attain, Clive tells him: "You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and

loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our fathers we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand" (276). By telling Edward that men understand such things, Clive flatters Edward and indoctrinates him into compliance with expected gender roles. Notice that while respect for the father is built into Clive's paradigm, the mother is absent; in the business of Empire, which Clive earlier equated with the family, the mother exists only as an abstraction, as an ideal. As Clive's reference to the Queen suggests, he habitually sees women in ideal rather than real terms. Within his hierarchy, males, the monarchy, and God share equal stature while real women have only idealized and/or subordinate roles. It is hardly surprising then that young boys should prefer to join the ranks of the privileged. Unfortunately, as Clive's indoctrination of Edward makes explicit, such privilege requires compliance with traditional gender behaviour. Those who will not, or like Edward who cannot, conform can expect to be excluded from the ranks of power associated with masculinity, monarchy, and divinity.

Nor is Clive alone in teaching Edward appropriate male behaviour. As the following demonstrates, women often collaborate in the reproduction and maintenance of a phallocentric status quo:

> BETTY: Edward, what have you got there?
>
> EDWARD: I'm minding her.
>
> BETTY: Edward, I've told you before, dolls are for girls. . . . You must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never, never. No one will talk to you, you won't be on the cricket team, you won't grow up to be a man like your papa.

EDWARD: I don't want to be like papa. I hate papa.

MAUD: Edward! Edward!

BETTY: You're a horrid wicked boy and papa will beat you. Of course you don't hate him, you love him. Now give Victoria her doll at once.

EDWARD: She's not Victoria's doll, she's my doll. She doesn't love Victoria and Victoria doesn't love her. Victoria never even plays with her.

BETTY: Victoria will learn to play with her.

EDWARD: She's mine and she loves me and she won't be happy if you take her away, she'll cry, she'll cry, she'll cry.

[BETTY *takes the doll away, slaps him, bursts into tears.* ELLEN *comes in.*]

ELLEN: Edward, you're a wicked boy. I am going to lock you in the nursery until supper time. Now go upstairs this minute.

[*She slaps* EDWARD, *who bursts into tears and goes out.*] (274-5)

Betty's lesson to Edward that dolls are for girls results from her fear of the ostracism and ridicule he will be subjected to by the boys at school should he reveal his gender inappropriate behaviour. Acting first as a softcop, Betty polices and attempts to regulate Edward's desires so they will conform with the gender norms deemed acceptable by another powerful softcop: the school. When her threat that Edward will not grow up to be a man like his father fails in its intended effect, Betty resorts to coercive means and attempts to evoke the authority of the father by first threatening Clive will be violent, and finally resorting to physical violence herself. Just as Edward must be taught *not* to

play with the doll, so too Victoria will be taught appropriate female behaviour and will learn *to* play with it. Both Edward's grandmother and governess enter the fray, weighing in on the side of repression of Edward's emergent homosexuality. By violently silencing Edward and forcing him to withdraw, Betty and Ellen exhibit what Foucault identifies as "the characteristic features of repression, . . . a sentence to disappear, but also . . . an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know" (4). That Ellen, a closeted lesbian, participates in the repression of another homosexual explicates the regulatory force of the social, sexual taboo. Because a woman actor plays Edward, the audience continually sees a concrete example of the social construction of gender roles and the damage they can inflict on homosexuals. On an even more practical level, by presenting a cross-cast adult in the role of the child Edward, Churchill mitigates any potential distaste engendered by the sex scenes between Harry and Edward. As she has throughout the first act, Churchill uses this particular epic device to represent dramatically the interiorized repression associated with all levels of colonial and sexual oppression. Because one of the effects of comedy is emotional distancing, the comedic element of the cross-casting enhances the play's didactic message.

While Act One depends largely, though not exclusively, on cross-casting for its alienation effect, in Act Two Churchill introduces other Brechtian epic devices such as time shifts, monologues, doubling, and repetition. The male signified of the first act, Clive, all but disappears, and the action in Act Two centres on Betty: Victoria is *her* daughter and Edward *her* son. As Churchill explains to Thurman, she wanted to

balance the male-dominated first act with a second act "dominated by women and gays and change," an act designed "to be unsettling--not to meet the audience's expectations. To catch them offguard" (56). And indeed, *Cloud Nine*'s audience usually initially finds Churchill's extraordinary time shift between acts quite disconcerting. In her cast list, Churchill explains the play's non-linear progression: "Act One takes place in a British colony in Africa in Victorian times. Act Two takes place in London in 1979. But for the characters it is twenty-five years later" (248). Churchill's disturbance of diachronic time serves as an epic device which demonstrates the persistence of Victorian values and practices in the modern world. Indeed, Brecht's comments about "the theatre of the scientific age" in paragraph sixty-four of his *Appendices to the Short Organum* (1952) capture the essence of Churchill's intention:

> The story does not just correspond to an incident from men's life together as it might actually have taken place, but is composed of episodes rearranged so as to allow the story-teller's ideas about men's life to find expression. In the same way the characters are not simply portraits of living people, but are rearranged and formed in accordance with ideas. (278)

Churchill rearranges episodes in order to interrogate the ways in which gender norms are socially constructed at different historical moments and in different social contexts. Churchill's shifts in time and place enable her to present characters who confuse and/or conflate identity and gender alongside characters who, with varying degrees of success, recognize gender as but one of many facets of identity.

Churchill uses time shifts most effectively through the character of Victoria to

examine historical and social norms in gender acquisition. Victoria, the two-year-old daughter named for a Queen yet ironically played by a dummy in Act One, becomes in Act Two a twenty-seven-year-old wife and mother who, having become politicized by radical feminist politics, experiments with bisexuality and lesbianism. Engaging in revisionary mythopoesis.[5] Churchill balances the two male-centered creation myths told by Joshua in Act One with a female-centered one told by Victoria in Act Two:

> Goddess of many names, oldest of the old, who walked in chaos and created life, hear us calling you back through time, before Jehovah, before Christ, before men drove you out and burnt your temples, hear us, Lady, give us back what we were, give us the history we haven't had, make us the women we can't be. . . . The priestess chose a lover for a year and he was king because she chose him and then he was killed at the end of the year. . . . And the women had the children and nobody knew it was done by fucking so they didn't know about fathers and nobody cared who the father was and the property was passed down through the maternal line--. (308-09)

In the midst of a drunken orgy in the park, Victoria, her female lover Lin, and Edward attempt to invoke the Goddess of "the sun, breasts, cunts, fat bellies, and blood, blood, blood" (309). Victoria's goddess, like Joshua's the "oldest of the old" and creator of life, was driven from her sanctuary by men, but Victoria challenges and attempts to overthrow the usurper by calling on the goddess to return and restore a time of

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[5]For a more detailed discussion of the tactics of revisionary mythopoesis, see my chapter centring on *Vinegar Tom*, Chapter Three.

matriarchal rule. By asking the goddess to "give us our history and make us the women we can't be," Victoria connects the oppression of women to their marginalization in history and links their emancipation and integration to their being written back into history. Also, her desire for a time when "property was passed down through the maternal line" reflects her theoretical awareness that "You can't separate fucking and economics" (309), that a strong correlation exists between what socialist feminists identify as the interlocking oppressions of sexism and capitalism.

Although, as she tells Lin, "It never hurts to understand the theoretical background" (309), Victoria's invocation of the goddess represents her move beyond theory towards practice. As Churchill explains in a letter to Richard Seyd, "[Victoria's] feminism and politics is [sic] all in books and the head and it takes her relationship with Lin to loosen things up and make it real" (52).[6] Although the goddess fails to appear, Victoria has begun the transition from a theoretical to a practical feminist existence, a transition that will culminate in her leaving her husband to set up a non-traditional family unit with her lesbian lover and gay brother. Instead of the goddess, Victoria's husband Martin and the ghost of Lin's brother Bill arrive in the park. The appearance of Martin, who "was all for the sixties when liberation just meant fucking" (310), and the ghost of Bill, a British soldier who died in Northern Ireland, testifies to the persistence of both sexism and colonialism. As Churchill explains to Judith Thurman: "The way people think of the Irish is rather the way men tend to think of women--as charming,

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[6]Churchill wrote a lengthy letter to Richard Seyd while he was directing a production of *Cloud Nine* at the Eureka Theatre Company in San Francisco, California in May of 1983. This letter remained unpublished until 1989 when Linda Fitzsimmons included it in her *File on Churchill* (London: Methuen, 1989. 48-54).

irresponsible, poetic creatures. Which, in fact, is the sort of stereotype colonial rulers traditionally have of the Native. You become beautiful because you don't have the power to be direct" (57). Indeed, Churchill's naming here demonstrates the pervasiveness of the internalization of colonialist norms. The fact that the Irish are excluded from her category of *people* suggests that she too is at times subject to colonialist internalization. That Victoria finally leaves Martin to live with Lin and Edward represents a first step, however slight, in overthrowing oppression and achieving some measure of autonomy. The time shift between the two acts enables Churchill to inject a modicum of optimism, to replace the passive, weak, inanimate doll of the first act with the actively engaged woman of the second.

In Act Two Churchill uses extensively another epic device, monologues that interrupt the action as the actor addresses the audience directly. Indeed, according to Churchill, "The second act was originally going to consist entirely of monologues" (Thurman 57). Like Brecht, who uses direct monologues most effectively in plays such as *A Man's a Man* (1924-26) and *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1929-31), Churchill uses monologues to strengthen and enrich epic theatre's narrative function. As Brecht suggests in *Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction* (1957), in epic theatre "the stage began to tell a story. The narrator was no longer missing, along with the fourth wall" (71). Although in some plays, such as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1943-45), Brecht provides a character like the story teller whose sole function is to act as narrator, in other plays such as *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1938-41), Brecht uses numerous monologues by Shen Te and Wong, among others, to perform the narrative role. In the second act of *Cloud Nine*, Churchill emulates the latter Brechtian tactic and engages in

"the very serious business of people telling about their lives" (Thurman 57) through monologues by Betty and Gerry.

It should be noted, however, that the monologues, like other episodes, can be read differently for different meanings. In the original London production of *Cloud Nine* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1979, Betty's monologue about masturbation occurs in the middle of the last scene, before she attempts to pick up the homosexual Gerry. However, in the original New York Production directed by Tommy Tune in 1981, Betty's monologue is moved to the end of the scene, after the attempted pick up. In an interview with Emily Mann, published in Betsko and Koenig's *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights*, Churchill speaks about the effects of the different structures in the British and American productions:

> It was sort of wonderful--the emotion of the end of the play in the American production--but I didn't like it as much because it threw so much emphasis onto Betty as an individual, while the other way seemed to be more about the development of a group of people, in the same way as the first act. The New York version meant that it ended with her very solitary, having the self-discovery that she enjoys sex in masturbation, but without taking her on from that to anything else. Whereas that monologue originally came earlier in the scene so you know from that that she's a sexual person and then you see her make her first move out toward someone else, even though it's a completely ridiculous and wrong move, trying to pick up her son's gay lover, but you know she'll have another go another time and it will work. (83)

As a British socialist feminist, Churchill is much more concerned with connecting individual understanding to a wider political strategy in society than with promoting the supreme individual associated with the liberal feminism more prevalent in the United States. When Betty states in her monologue, "I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there" (316), she represents a wider network of women whose identity is bound up entirely in others', usually their husbands', perceptions of them. Similarly, Betty's exclamation that masturbation allowed her to feel "triumphant because I was a separate person" (316) foreshadows the self-acceptance so powerfully presented in the parody of a traditional happy ending in which the hero and heroine embrace. In *Cloud Nine*, "BETTY *from Act One comes.* BETTY *and* BETTY *embrace*" (320). Churchill uses the embrace between the two women as a symbolic image of the solidarity in the sisterhood of women, of the fact that individual emancipation is a precursor to collective resistance.

Churchill's assertion that the placement of Betty's monologue in the British production allows for the development of a group of people instead of that of the individual is borne out in the text. Victoria initially rejects Betty's plan to move in and share expenses with Victoria and Lin: "But mummy we don't even like each other" (317). Shortly thereafter, Victoria accedes to Lin's suggestion: "Don't think of her as your mother, think of her as Betty" (317). Later that same day Victoria asks, "Betty, would you like an ice cream?" (318), thereby demonstrating her acceptance of her mother as a person in her own right, as a desiring subject whose identity consists of more than the stereotypical role of the idealized mother forced upon her by Clive and Harry in the first act.

Importantly, not only the women experience individual emancipation in Churchill's play. Gerry's growth of character, like Victoria's, becomes explicit after Betty's monologue in the British production. Initially unwilling to commit to anyone, Gerry develops to the point where he may finally be ready to make a commitment to Edward, as his admittedly provisional assertion to Betty demonstrates: "I might be going to live with Edward again" (319). Even Martin, who initially could only speak and write about feminism, arrogantly speaking *for* women by "writing a novel about women from the women's point of view" (302), undergoes a degree of character development. Although still wanting "some credit" for taking care of his own child and still grumbling about having to "look after [Lin's] child," Martin's final words of the play, "Sometimes I keep [Tommy] up watching television till he falls asleep on the sofa so I can hold him. Come on, Cathy, we'll get another ice cream" (318), suggest that like Victoria he has made the move from theory to practice. While he still finds it difficult to relinquish completely the power accruing to men within capitalist patriarchy, his acceptance of a nurturing role represents a first step and speaks much more loudly than all his words in the previous scenes. Clearly then, the placement of Betty's monologue is crucial to Churchill's text. Its placement in the original British production of *Cloud Nine* allows Churchill to concern herself with the wider social network long acknowledged as a major concern of socialist politics.

The placement of Gerry's first monologue also caused a degree of concern for the Joint Stock company, as Churchill explains in her letter to Richard Seyd:

> Originally Gerry's monologue was at the beginning . . . and it was a nice jolt to start the act as clearly somewhere different. But it gave the

> audience a fright and turned them against Gerry, who seemed just the sort of horrible maniac they hoped they'd never meet on a train, which was not the intention. By moving it to after the scene with Edward (this was in England after about a week of touring) it made people more on Gerry's side and able to go off and enjoy the adventure with him. (Fitzsimmons 52)

The intention of Gerry's monologue was not to turn the audience against him, but to instruct them about mid to late twentieth-century British homosexuals and homosexuality. By moving Gerry's monologue so that it comes after the scene with Edward, Churchill urges her audience to see Gerry as a young man who desires his freedom but who is being emotionally smothered by his partner. Consequently, the sexual explicitness of Gerry's first monologue, his detailed description of the fellation and masturbation on the train, rather than being offensive or frightening, can be accepted as a humorous, if somewhat socially inappropriate, exhibition of a randy youth at the peak of his sexual attractiveness. Churchill suggests in her letter to Seyd that Gerry "does love Edward and he does also enjoy promiscuity. He genuinely likes being alone, that's not just defensive, but the change he goes through . . . is realizing how much he loves and depends on Edward and would like to get him back" (Fitzsimmons 52). The duality of Gerry's emotions becomes explicit in his second monologue. While on the one hand he talks about being able to "have sex any time . . . every day of the week," and "quite lik[ing] living alone," on the other, he concludes his monologue by crying: "Edward! Edward!" (311). As Churchill tells Seyd, the important thing about Gerry "is that he's nice, not particularly fucked up" (Fitzsimmons 52). And indeed, the

friendship and encouragement he offers Betty, to keep trying because "Not everybody's gay" (320), is kindness itself. Churchill uses Gerry's two monologues, then, to normalize both homosexuals and homosexuality. By pausing the action and having Gerry address the audience directly, Churchill ensures that his monologues, like Betty's, work as alienation effects and serve to make explicit the narrative element so essential in what Brecht calls dialectical theatre.

Doubling is yet another alienation effect Churchill utilizes in *Cloud Nine*. The doubling of Ellen and Mrs. Saunders was the only instance of doubling in Act One, but as Churchill says in her introduction to the play, it "was not intended to make a point so much as for sheer fun--and of course to keep the company to seven in each act" (246-7). However, all the characters of Act Two are doubled with characters from the first act. In the original Royal Court production, the doubling went as follows: Clive--Cathy, Betty 1--Edward 2, Joshua--Gerry, Edward 1--Betty 2, Maud--Victoria, Ellen/Mrs. Saunders--Lin, and Harry--Martin. Although Churchill suggests that "the doubling can be done in any way that seems right for any particular production," she goes on to explain her preference for the doubling in the original production: "I like seeing Clive become Cathy, and enjoy the Edward--Betty connections" (247). No matter how the doubling is done, "some interesting resonances between the two acts" (247) are bound to occur. Any time the audience sees Betty, for example, they will be reminded of Edward, and vice versa, and make their own connections. Such reminders work as alienation effects because they continually remind the audience that they are watching a play, thereby disrupting their empathy and causing them to think about what they see. This is not to suggest, however, that the actors should act self-consciously, as Brecht

makes clear in his *Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting* (1957): "The alienation effect does not in any way demand an unnatural way of acting. . . . On the contrary, the achievement of the A-effect absolutely depends on lightness and naturalness of performance" (95). The doubling becomes even more effective, Brecht's comments would suggest, by the actor's apparent unconsciousness of it. Just as the cross-cast actors of the first act must appear to be unaware of the incongruity of their appearance, so too must the doubled actors seem natural and at ease in their new roles.

In *Cloud Nine* Churchill adds an innovative dimension to her doubling; instead of just doubling roles, she doubles dialogue as well. For example, immediately following Gerry's second monologue in the third scene of Act Two, Edward from Act One appears, and he and Gerry repeat word for word a dialogue between Harry and Edward in the first act:

> EDWARD: Gerry I love you.
>
> GERRY: Yes, I know. I love you too.
>
> EDWARD: You know what we did? I want to do it again. I think about it all the time.
>
> Don't you want to any more?
>
> GERRY: Yes, of course. (311)

The fact that the same actor plays Joshua and Gerry helps the audience make certain connections between those two characters, but by having Gerry repeat the words spoken by Harry in Act One, Churchill aids the audience in making connections between Edward's two lovers and understanding how little Edward's situation has changed in twenty-five years. As the symbolically feminine half of each pairing, a point made

explicit by the involvement in the dialogue by the female Edward from Act One. Edward exhibits very little power, being placed in the position of having to ask for love from both men. Churchill makes the connection between Harry and Gerry visual when, immediately after Gerry makes a date with Edward, "HARRY *and* GERRY *pick each other up*" (315).

Churchill complicates the Harry--Gerry connection even more, however, through another instance of repeated dialogue. In the second scene of Act Two, Martin, played by the actor who played Harry in Act One, concludes a long rambling speech in which he blames Victoria for his impotence, with the final authoritative command: "Just be yourself. You don't seem to realize how insulting it is to me that you can't get yourself together" (301). In the next scene of the act, Gerry quarrels with Edward and echoes Martin's exhortation to Victoria:

> GERRY: Stop it.
>
> EDWARD: Stop what?
>
> GERRY: Just be yourself.
>
> EDWARD: I don't know what you mean. Everyone's always tried to stop me being feminine and now you are too.
>
> GERRY: You're putting it on.
>
> EDWARD: I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked. You do like me like this really.
>
> GERRY: I'm bored, Eddy. (306)

Just as the doubled role connects Martin and Harry, so too the doubled dialogue connects Martin and Gerry, and syllogistically, Harry and Gerry as well. Suggesting

that maleness constitutes power in sexual relationships, even in homosexual ones. Churchill reveals that in both situations the order to "just be yourself" results from a masculine desire for comfort. Martin wants Victoria to be herself primarily because her gender confusion is "insulting" to him, while Gerry finds Edward's commitment to a monogamous relationship "boring." It soon becomes apparent that neither Martin nor Gerry wants their partners to be themselves. In fact, when they say "Just be yourself," they really mean, "Just be what I want you to be, what I think you should be." Churchill uses doubled dialogue, then, in much the same way that she uses doubled roles, to make connections and to complicate the relationships between and among characters.

Nowhere is Churchill's strategy more obvious than in the final instance of doubled dialogue occurring at the end of the play's final scene. Just before Betty from Act One and Betty from Act Two embrace, Clive comes on stage and says the last lines of the play: "You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can't believe you are. I can't feel the same about you as I did. And Africa is to be communist I suppose. I used to be proud to be British. There was a high ideal. I came out onto the verandah and looked at the stars" (320). By giving the last word to Clive, Churchill acknowledges the on-going influence of patriarchal power. However, the fact that Clive once again misjudges Betty, insisting that she is not the kind of women she so clearly is, suggests a desperate but doomed attempt to restore patriarchal authority. His refusal to accept the overthrow of oppression, be it sexist or colonial, while exposing his repressive hypocrisy, also problematizes the notion of complete emancipation. Through the doubled dialogue, Churchill connects the two acts and suggests that liberation from the past, from the Victorian attitudes and values of the first act, is incomplete. However, although

Churchill gives Clive the last word, she gives the last action to Betty. Because Clive's speech is succeeded by the embrace between the two Bettys, Churchill posits the possibility for change and for a reclaiming of individual and societal power. Churchill uses doubled dialogue, like the time shifts, as an alienation effect that enables her to infuse her play with a modicum of optimism and hope for a more equitable future.

In *Cloud Nine* then, Churchill uses numerous epic devices to unmask the hierarchical power relations inherent in gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation. A detailed study of her play reveals how she uses epic devices such as, but not restricted to, collective working method, songs, monologues, parodic verse, cross-casting, time shifts, and doubling of roles and dialogue to expose historically specific power relations within capitalist, patriarchal, imperialist cultures. Churchill uses her play to expose the ways in which social power relations are produced and sustained, and in so doing demonstrates that these hierarchical relations can be contested and changed.

CHAPTER FIVE

But most of us is fighting the devils. (Top Girls)

In *Top Girls* (1982), Churchill uses epic devices to investigate a new history, to challenge traditional ideas about historical significance by interweaving female characters from historical and contemporary eras.[1] Exploring women's personal and subjective experiences alongside their social and political activities, Churchill interrogates the relationship between the past and current social practice. In her play she presents what noted historian Joan W. Scott calls "a synthesizing perspective that can explain continuities and discontinuities and account for persisting inequalities as well as radically different social experiences" (1055). In her influential article entitled "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986), Scott suggests that such a synthesis can best be accomplished by viewing gender as a social construction of ideas about the subjective identities of women and men. She presents a definition of gender containing two propositions: "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (1067). In *Top Girls*, Churchill incorporates Scott's conception of gender and uses it as an analytic category in her writing of women back into history.

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[1]In *Liberating Women's History* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1976), editor Bernice Carroll includes an article by three contemporary feminist historians, Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle, and Nancy Shrom Dye, entitled "The Problem of Women's History," in which they argue for "not only a new history of women, but a new history" (89). According to these historians, such a new history "involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal, subjective experience as well as public and political activities" (89).

Unlike *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Cloud Nine*, and *Fen*, which were written in conjunction with Joint Stock, Churchill wrote *Top Girls* without the aid and support of a theatre collective. This is not to suggest, however, that she abandoned entirely the working methods that had proven so successful in the earlier plays. As Churchill explains in an interview with Emily Mann, published in Betsko and Koenig's *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* (1987), she soon found herself returning to the preparatory techniques that had previously worked so well:

> When I wrote *Top Girls* I was writing it by myself and not for a company. I wanted to write about women doing different kinds of work and didn't feel I knew enough about it. Then I thought, this is ridiculous, if you were with a company you'd go out and talk to people, so I did. Which is how I came up with the employment agency in the second act. (82)

Of course, Churchill's preparation consisted of more than merely talking to people. Just as the company engaged in study sessions in the workshops, so too many of Churchill's ideas for the play came about as the result of textual research. Additionally, as Churchill explains in an interview with Lynne Truss, published under the title "A Fair Cop" (1984),

> The idea for *Top Girls* came from all kinds of things. . . . The idea for Dull Gret as a character I found in some old notebook from 1977 or 78.[2]

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[2]Bertolt Brecht also found Dull Gret, -- and indeed all of Brueghel's paintings -- an interesting topic for discussion, as can be seen in his essay entitled "Alienation Effects in the Narrative Pictures of the Elder Brueghel" (1957).

> There'd been the idea of a play about a lot of dead women having coffee with someone from the present. And an idea about women doing all kinds of jobs. It was also that Thatcher had just become prime minister; and also I had been to America for a student production of *Vinegar Tom* and had been talking to women there who were saying things were going very well: they were getting far more women executives, women vice-presidents and so on. And that was such a different attitude from anything I'd ever met here, where feminism tends to be much more connected with socialism and not so much to do with women succeeding on the sort of capitalist ladder. All those ideas fed into *Top Girls*. (8)

Clearly then, in writing *Top Girls*, Churchill employed numerous techniques and strategies, several of which she had used earlier in collaboration with the Joint Stock Theatre Company.

Although Churchill worked independently of Joint Stock for her original production of *Top Girls* at the Royal Court Theatre on August 28, 1982, she did continue her long-standing association with one of the Royal Court's most influential directors, Max Stafford-Clark. As Churchill explains to Betsko and Koenig, her choice of Stafford-Clark was a strategic one: "I've always got on well with directors. But it depends on having someone with roughly the same ideas as you so you trust each other, and if you do work well together you keep on with the same people, as I have with Max Stafford-Clark" (79). Having a director who understands what the playwright is trying to achieve ensures that the playwright's political intentions will not be misunderstood or misinterpreted, as was the case at the Cologne Premiere of *Top Girls*, directed by Walter

Adler. In her interview with Emily Mann, Churchill explains how her socialist-feminist play was made to look like an anti-female work at its German premiere:

> Another example of its being open to misunderstanding was a production in Cologne, Germany, where the women characters were played as miserable and quarrelsome and competitive at the dinner, and the women in the office were neurotic and incapable. The waitress slunk about in a catsuit like a bunnygirl and Win changed her clothes on stage in the office. It just turned into a complete travesty of what it was supposed to be. (82)

Although, as Churchill's selection of Stafford-Clark makes explicit, not only women can direct a feminist play, *Top Girls*' socialist feminist agenda can easily be subverted in uncomprehending male hands. Male audiences, Churchill explains, have been known to ignore the play's feminist message even in a production that honours Churchill's politics, and invest that message with a misogyny entirely absent from her original script. In a Greek production of *Top Girls*, "the attitude of some of the men seeing it was . . . that the women in the play who'd gone out to work weren't very nice, weren't happy, and they abandoned their children. They felt the play was obviously saying women *shouldn't* go out to work--they took it to mean what they were wanting to say about women themselves, which is depressing. Highly depressing" (Betsko and Koenig 82). As these examples demonstrate, Churchill's strategic selection of Stafford-Clark as director for *Top Girls* was a wise one. By choosing a director who shared her ideas, Churchill ensured a production which would remain true to her own socialist feminist politics.

Churchill's choice of title for her play was likewise strategic. In the article about gender as a category of historical analysis, Joan W. Scott suggests:

> As a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, gender involves four interrelated elements: first, culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations . . . Second, normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities . . . [third] a notion of politics as well as reference to social institutions and organizations . . . [and fourth] subjective identity. (1067-68)

Churchill's title, *Top Girls*, is itself a culturally available symbol that evokes numerous representations. Like the Top Girls Employment Agency for which it was named, the play's title suggests a select few. After all, as Win instructs Angie in Act Two, Scene Three: "There's not many top ladies about" (118).[3] But, it must be remembered that, despite the presence of Lady Nijo and the countless references to ladies, the play is not called *Top Ladies*, a term with courtly overtones. The name *Top Girls* undermines any implication of status or authority that would be associated with the phrase *Top Ladies*. For many years feminists have objected to the use of the word *girls* to refer to women on the grounds that it tends to represent women in narrow, diminutive, frivolous terms. Just as men of colour object to the patronizing, demeaning implications in the word *boy*, so, too, women often take exception to the label *girl*. Additionally, while the women in the

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[3]As Churchill explains in her production note, she originally wrote *Top Girls* in three acts, a format which she prefers. However, in the original production, the play was divided into two acts with only one interval. Throughout this chapter I refer to the three acts as presented in the Methuen edition of Churchill's *Plays: Two*.

agency may be at the top, at the pinnacle of their careers, the fact remains that they are only the best of the women, not the best of everyone. While they may have gone as far as it is possible for women to go, the limitation implicit in the title undermines their accomplishments. Of course, the word *top* necessarily implies a middle and a bottom, reflecting the social stratification made visible in the play's first act, the way in which some women enjoy positions of privilege in relation to other women. Using Britain's pre-eminent Top Girl, Margaret Thatcher, as an example, Joyce demonstrates that merely having a woman in the top position does not ensure equality for all women: "What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms. Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina. Great adventures" (138). Joyce mockingly uses the feminist title Ms. both to challenge Marlene's notion that female and feminist are synonymous and to suggest that a female prime minister who would behave as brutally and destructively as did Hitler could only have a negative impact on the lives of the majority of women. Additionally, the play's title makes explicit the ascent from bottom to top of the corporate ladder. Through her strategic choice of title, then, Churchill relies on readily available cultural symbols to demonstrate how throughout history Top Girls, like other women, have been consigned to and kept in their male-defined places.

Churchill uses a visually jarring first act as an alienation effect which makes visible the trans-historical and trans-cultural nature of this oppression of women. She brings six women from different historical periods and social classes together in a London restaurant in 1982, thereby engaging in what Brecht describes as "develop[ing] the historical sense . . . into a real sensual delight" (Brecht 276). By presenting these

diverse women together on stage in their period costumes. Churchill, like Brecht in paragraph twelve of "Appendices to the Short Organum" (1952), acknowledges "our delight in comparisons, in distance, in dissimilarity--which is at the same time a delight in what is close and proper to ourselves" (276). Because the other characters appear on stage in costumes appropriate to their historical and cultural contexts, Marlene's contemporary British outfit is seen as historically and culturally specific as well. Throughout the act, the audience is continually presented with a humorous, if somewhat incongruous, image of women from six different historical periods and vastly different cultural and geographical milieux, who interact as though such meetings occurred regularly. As Churchill explains to Renate Klett in "Anything's Possible in the Theatre" (1984), live theatre makes possible a meeting between such disparate characters: "If you want to bring characters from the past onto the stage then you can do it, without having to find a realistic justification, such as presenting it as Marlene's dream. On stage it is possible for these women to meet and have dinner" (19). Indeed, as Brecht suggests in "Notes on Erwin Strittmatter's Play 'Katzgraben'" (1958), in epic theatre such humorous renditions of history are not only possible, but highly recommended:

> That is why [Strittmatter's] history is comedy. He is narrating part of his class's story as a story of surmountable difficulties, corrigible ineptitudes, at which he laughs without ever taking them too lightly. And this is how we must perform the play: we must infect a working-class audience with the urge to alter the world (and supply it with some of the relevant knowledge). (247)

Like Strittmatter, Churchill utilizes alienation effects to narrate her class and gender

story, to instruct her audience about the need for social change. She too presents history as comedy in an attempt to infuse her audience with an awareness about the futility of individual emancipation without concurrent societal transformation. Churchill's presentation of this situationally humorous collection of women, then, works to instruct even as it delights.

By devoting the entire first act, almost one-third of the play, to these historically and culturally diversified women characters, Churchill also foregrounds another of the aspects of gender identified by Joan W. Scott: subjective identity. In her article, Scott identifies the need "to examine the ways in which gendered identities are substantively constructed and relate [the] findings to a range of activities, social organizations, and historically specific cultural representations" (1068). Scott goes on to suggest that "the best efforts in this area so far have been, not surprisingly, biographies" (1068). In the preface to *Top Girls, The Plays of the Seventies* (1986), Churchill acknowledges the use of two biographies as sources for her play: *The Confessions of Lady Nijo*, and Pat Barr's account of the life of Isabella Bird, entitled *A Curious Life for a Lady*. Additionally, as her note at the beginning of the play makes clear, Churchill has obviously done biographical research concerning Pope Joan as well.

However, as Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle, and Nancy Schrom Dye suggest in "The Problem of Women's History" (1976), biographies tend to chronicle the lives of only rare and extraordinary women, the top girls of their societies or eras:

> Biographies are inherently limited . . . in that they can tell us very little about the life-style of the overwhelming majority of women who were not members of a small social elite or who did not pioneer in one of the

> professions. . . . The very existence of written materials on a woman tells us that she was exceptional; she had the leisure and ability to write, she had the opportunity to experience something other than the basic production for her household, and she lived in a family conscious enough of its heritage to preserve family records. Sometimes the existence of written sources on a woman indicates only that she was married to a famous man. (79)

Not surprisingly then, the women in the first act are for the most part extraordinary in ways patriarchal history would recognize. As Churchill explains in her "Note on characters," Pope Joan occupied a position which even to this day remains inaccessible to women: "disguised as a man, [she] is thought to have been Pope between 854-856" (52). Similarly, Isabella Bird (1831-1904), who "lived in Edinburgh, [and] travelled extensively between the ages of 40 and 70" (52), experienced something well beyond the household experiences of most women of her day. During her travels, Bird had the leisure and ability to write numerous texts about the places she visited, including a cultural geography of Korea, which until the 1950s was accepted as authoritative.[4] Likewise, Lady Nijo (b.1258), a Japanese woman who "was an Emperor's courtesan and later a Buddhist nun who travelled on foot through Japan" (52), came from a family acutely conscious of its heritage. As Nijo tells Marlene, "I come of a line of eight

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[4]I am grateful to Amelia Howe Kritzer who, in Chapter Seven: "Labour and Capital" in her text on Churchill entitled *The Plays of Caryl Churchill* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), includes a footnote detailing the literary contributions of both Isabella Bird and Lady Nijo.

generations of poets. Father had a poem in the anthology" (57).[5] In fact, Lady Nijo's memoir is considered by many as an excellent example of mediaeval Japanese court poetry.[6] Patient Griselda, "the obedient wife whose story is told by Chaucer in The Clerk's Tale of *The Canterbury Tales*" (52), has been written about by Petrarch, Boccacio, and Chaucer primarily because of her elevation to membership in a small social elite by virtue of her marriage to a Marquis. Even Dull Gret, who "is the subject of the Brueghel painting . . . in which a woman in an apron and armour leads a crowd of women charging through hell and fighting the devils" (52), is represented in the allegorical painting and in the play as having experienced something not likely to be duplicated by the majority of women (or men) of any period. By placing Marlene together with these exceptional women, Churchill suggests that her promotion to managing director "over all the women [she] work[s] with. And the men" (67) represents a singular achievement. Like the other women in Act One, Marlene achieves her status as a Top Girl on the basis of individual accomplishments, because she attains something beyond the reach of the majority of women.

The waitress, who stands in stark contrast to the other women in the act, is the only character who does not qualify as a Top Girl, and consequently must serve those

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[5]In the interests of clarity, I have deleted directorial marks when quoting from the play, but Churchill uses a slash (/) to indicate when a character continues speaking right through another's speech and to mark the point of interruption when one character starts speaking before another has finished. She also uses an asterisk (*) to show the continuity when a speech follows on from a speech earlier than the one printed immediately before it.

[6]Again I must acknowledge Amelia Howe Kritzer's text for providing the following information: "Nijo's memoir, which she wrote in an effort to reclaim her family's literary reputation, has recently been rediscovered and recognized as a major work of mediaeval Japanese court poetry" (209).

who do. Going through the entire act without speaking, she represents the vast majority of ordinary women who silently struggle against poverty and oppression. Within capitalist, patriarchal societies, the play suggests, Top Girls achieve success on the backs of ordinary working women. Like the unexceptional women in the subsequent acts, the waitress makes concrete the enormous difference between individual achievement and collective social change. By the end of the act, the festive mood gradually shifts to one of maudlin pain and anguish, making possible a recognition of the futility and hollowness of individual achievements such as those worked for by the play's Top Girls.

Although all the Top Girls of the first act are extraordinary in some way, they nonetheless represent decidedly different social classes and they experience profoundly different existential realities. As Bertolt Brecht suggests in paragraph thirty-seven of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949), the representation on stage of such differences helps epic dramatists foster a critical attitude in their audiences:

> If we ensure that our characters on the stage are moved by social impulses and that these differ according to the period, then we make it harder for our spectator to identify himself with them. He cannot simply feel: that's how I would act, but at most can say: if I had lived under those circumstances. And if we play works dealing with our own time as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which he himself acts will strike him as equally odd; and this is where the critical attitude begins. (190)

By setting these women together in a contemporary situation, Churchill constructs the present as just one of history's time periods. Although the women share a sex, each has

her own unique class and cultural concerns. Marlene, however, refuses to acknowledge the obvious differences among the women. Demonstrating her allegiance to the motto "Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes" (140), Marlene ignores completely class differences. As she tells Joyce, "I don't believe in class" (141). So, when the other women offer a toast to her success, she attempts to elide the differences, to impose a commonality of achievement which is at least questionable:

> ISABELLA. To Marlene.
>
> MARLENE. And *all* of us.
>
> JOAN. Marlene.
>
> NIJO. Marlene.
>
> GRET. Marlene.
>
> MARLENE. *We've all* come a long way. To *our* courage and the way *we* changed *our* lives and *our* extraordinary achievements. [emphasis added] (67)

Marlene's assertion relies upon another culturally available symbol, that of the Virginia Slims advertisement motto: "You've come a long way, baby." As my added emphasis highlights, Marlene attempts to convert individual accomplishment into collective achievement. Like many bourgeois feminists, Marlene remains blind to differences of class, culture and sexual orientation, seeing only the token power achieved by Top Girls. It is not until the end of the play that Marlene finally admits her self-centred, self-interested individualism. When Joyce asks for whom the eighties will be stupendous, Marlene responds "For *me*. *I* think *I'm* going up up up. . . . *I* believe in the individual. Look at *me*" [emphasis added] (136-7). Churchill, as a socialist feminist, foregrounds Marlene's class blindness in order to displace it, to contrast it eventually with Joyce's

class-conscious feminism.

Throughout the first act, and indeed the entire play, Churchill fosters a critical attitude in her audience by making explicit class and cultural distinctions among the women in order to demonstrate that gender concerns cannot be viewed in isolation from other factors that shape social experience. Pope Joan, who lived in Italy during the early- to mid-ninth century, was "by way of an infant prodigy" (58) who rose to the top of a religious hierarchy, to "the life of a Pope [which] is quite luxurious" (70). Saying "I'm a heresy myself" (60), Joan acknowledges that within Roman Catholicism women can reach the top only by becoming heretical, by living at variance with institutionalized mores and beliefs. Although her gender should have prevented her from acquiring an education -- after all, "women weren't allowed in the library" (62) -- Joan managed to overcome the double obstacles of poverty and femaleness. She did so, however, at great cost. Completely alienated from her female body, when she became pregnant she "didn't know what was happening" (70) and, ironically, needed her male lover to explain the situation. In order to succeed in a man's world, Joan, who "didn't live a woman's life" (78), was forced to become an honorary man, to emulate the oppressors who associate women with "children and lunatics" (69) in order to prevent them from gaining equality, let alone rising to become Pope.

Like Pope Joan, Isabella Bird lived a life of travel and adventure more commonly associated with men. Unlike Joan, however, Isabella "always travelled as a lady and [she] repudiated strongly any suggestion in the press that [she] was other than feminine" (62). Her status as a lady was extremely important to the class-conscious Isabella, who sneered at the "barbaric practices in the east/Among the lower classes" (60). Born in

Victorian Scotland to an obviously wealthy clergyman father. Isabella could afford the expense of world travel and therefore enjoyed the kind of life inaccessible to most Victorian of her day. Her experiences, however, failed to overcome her insularity and intolerance towards those who existed outside the parameters of her upper-class, Church-of-England milieu. While on the one hand Isabella cherished the class privilege associated with being a lady, on the other she resented bitterly the gender restrictions implicit in the term. When she says "I cannot and will not live the life of a lady" (80), she verbalizes her refusal to be subjected to the standard imposed upon her by the patriarchal Victorian society in which she lived. Her final assertion, "I was the only European woman ever to have seen the Emperor of Morocco" (83), makes explicit her difference from other women in her society and demonstrates that she, as surely as Joan, became an honorary man in order to achieve individual fulfilment.

Like Isabella, Marlene attempts to dissociate herself from other women who might prevent her from making it to the top of the business world. Unlike Isabella, who is born to upper middle-class parents, Marlene is born to poor, working-class parents and is thus determined to dissociate herself from her class roots. Telling Joyce, "I hate the working class . . . it doesn't exist anymore, it means lazy and stupid" (139), Marlene makes clear her rejection of the "fucking awful life" (132) she associates with her parents' working-class existence. Marlene resembles both Joan and Isabella in that she attempts to become an honorary man, to emulate rather than fight the oppressor. So successful is Marlene's gender transformation that she not only acquires metaphorical male anatomy, "far more balls than Howard" (100), she also becomes an oppressor in her relations with her female clients at the Top Girls Employment Agency. In an

interview in which she convinces Jeanine to take a position with little chance of advancement except over a few women, Marlene demonstrates her acceptance of patriarchal, capitalist attitudes towards women employees. Like Isabella, Marlene feels little solidarity with other women, especially working-class women like her sister and her own child, whom she rejects not just when she abandons her to Joyce's care, but again when, at the play's chronological end, she declares: "She's not going to make it" (120).

Instead of attempting to emulate the oppressors as do Marlene, Isabella, and Joan, in both Chaucer's tale and Churchill's play Patient Griselda concedes to the oppressor and accepts patriarchal domination as a given. Born in rural England during the fourteenth century to a poor peasant family, Griselda is extricated from the poverty and misery of her class by virtue of marriage to a Marquis. When Griselda was a mere child of fifteen, the Marquis "spoke to [Griselda's] father" (75), who was so intimidated by the Marquis' rank that he "could hardly speak" (75), and made explicit the condition upon which Griselda's elevation rested: "The Marquis said it wasn't an order, I could say no, but if I said yes I must always obey him in everything" (75). Although the Marquis' proposal is phrased as a request rather than an order, in actuality Griselda's existential reality made her acceptance of it a foregone conclusion. Indeed, Griselda sees nothing extraordinary in the Marquis' request for total obedience because, as she tells Marlene, "of course a wife must obey her husband. And of course I must obey the Marquis" (75). As that "of course" demonstrates, Griselda accepts as natural the double duty of obedience as wife and subject. Taking obedience to an absurd level, Griselda acquiesces to every unreasonable command from her husband and master until she has

been stripped of virtually everything: her daughter, her son, her husband, and even the clothes from her body. And yet, although all these things are eventually restored to her, Griselda just manages to keep alive a vestigial sense of injustice. Her final words in the play, "I do think--I do wonder--it would have been nicer if Walter hadn't had to" (81), demonstrate her awareness that achievement by virtue of total concession to the oppressor represents a hollow and unsatisfying achievement.

Like Griselda, Lady Nijo generally concedes to patriarchal and class-based oppression. Born in Japan in the mid-thirteenth century, Nijo, the daughter of a court poet, "was brought up from a baby" (57) to be the mistress of an Emperor. Although of a higher social class than Griselda, Nijo was also given by her father to a much older, more socially prominent, and more powerful man when she was little more than a child of fourteen. Believing that she "belonged to him" (57), Nijo meekly accepted the Emperor's acts of rape, procurement, and voyeurism as his rights of ownership and as his rights of royalty. Not surprisingly, when she inevitably fell out of favour, she went from one hopeless relationship to another. Even her wandering life as a vagrant nun was inspired not so much by a desire for self-fulfilment as by a promise to her dying father to "enter holy orders" (57) if she ever lost the Emperor's favour. Telling the other women that "the first half of my life was all sin and the second all repentance" (59), Nijo demonstrates that she has internalized the feelings of guilt and worthlessness instilled in her since birth. And yet, her proudest memory is of the time when she, Lady Genki, and the other ladies collectively challenged the Emperor's right to abuse them:

> Lady Genki and I made a plan, and the ladies all hid in his rooms, and Lady Mashimizu stood guard with a stick at the door, and when His

> Majesty came in Genki seized him and I beat him until he cried out and promised he would never order anyone to hit us again. Afterwards there was a terrible fuss. The nobles were horrified. 'We wouldn't even dream of stepping on your Majesty's shadow.' And I had hit him with a stick. Yes, I hit him with a stick. (80-81)

Repeating the phrase "I hit him with a stick," Nijo relives again and again the moment when the roles were reversed and she exacted revenge from the most powerful and visible symbol of masculine authority. Her continual repetition suggests that she herself is amazed by her audacity. Excluded from power by virtue of their gender, she and the other court ladies horrified their male counterparts by engaging in the physical violence traditionally reserved for men who, at the Full Moon Ceremony, "beat their women across the loins so they'll have sons and not daughters" (80). Although their appropriation of power was short-lived, for one awe-inspiring moment, especially in light of the historical context, Nijo and the other women overcame their conditioning to acquiesce, and actively challenged patriarchal power and domination. Churchill's strategic placement of Nijo's story near the end of the act ensures that it resonates strongly with Dull Gret's tale of collective resistance.

The resistance of Nijo and the court ladies presages the act of collective resistance of Dull Gret and her neighbours who go into hell to fight the devils. Born in the Flanders region of Belgium in the sixteenth century, Dull Gret belongs to the lowest rural peasant class. Although uneducated and somewhat coarse, Gret refuses either to emulate or concede to the oppressor. Instead, she and the other peasant women respond to oppression with violent resistance. Despite Nijo's interjection that "All the *ladies*

come" [emphasis added] (82). Gret makes it clear that she and her neighbours are not ladies but simple housewives who "come out just as they was [sic] from baking and washing in their aprons" (82). Like the resistance of Nijo and the court ladies, Gret's and her neighbour's political resistance has its roots in personal experience: "We'd all had family killed. My big son die on a wheel. Birds eat him. My baby, a soldier run her through with a sword. I'd had enough, I was mad, I hate the bastards" (82).[7] The bastards here represent the agents of class and gender oppression, in the form of Spanish soldiery, requiring collective female resistance. Although capitalism, represented in Gret's story by the "big devil" who excretes money from a "big hole in his arse" (82), prompts some women to put individual attainment above social reform, many more women, the play optimistically suggests, recognize and respond to the need for collective action. According to Gret: "a lot of the women stop and get some [money]. But *most* of us is fighting the devils" [emphasis added] (82). Presenting Gret and the other women

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[7]I am indebted to Linda Fitzsimmons who, in her article "I won't turn back for you or anyone: Caryl Churchill's Socialist-Feminist Theatre" (*Essays in Theatre* 6:1 (1987): 19-29), explains how Churchill made several subtle but important changes to her original play: "As originally written, [Gret's] speech . . . had no interruptions. The interruptions that Churchill writes for the later edition are not, though, of the same order as those in the rest of the scene. Hence, rather than deflecting attention away from the original speaker, they point our attention to her. Two sentences into Gret's speech, Marlene tells Joan, "Shut up, pet" and Isabella says, "Listen, she's been to hell." The characters', and so the audience's, attention is drawn to Gret in a way that happens nowhere else in the scene. . . . Earlier in the speech, Churchill replaces Gret's generalised "Men on wheels. Babies on swords" with the more specific, "My big son die on wheel. Birds eat him. My baby, a soldier run her through with a sword" (p. 28). She is given personal motivation for her political action, and this experience allies her with Joan, Isabella, and Nijo. . . . Their personal disaffection leads into Gret's advocating a way forward. The last significant textual alteration here is in the final set of stage directions for the scene. In the earlier text, we have "Nijo is crying." This changes to "Nijo is laughing and crying" (p. 29), to express recognition not only of the difficulties and sorrow and suffering but also of exhilaration and of hope for eventual triumph" (21).

from the lowest social class as the symbol of effective, collective female resistance. Churchill suggests that gender transformation requires a corresponding building of solidarity across class lines. Explicating class and cultural distinctions among the women, then, enables Churchill to interrogate critically the apparent lack of unity among persons of the same gender.

This is not to suggest, however, that Churchill fails to recognize and address the unique features of gender oppression, to explore the commonalities in women's experience under patriarchal systems. In an attempt to demonstrate the continuity of patriarchal oppression, to show how in some respects little has changed for women from the Rome of 854 to present-day London, Churchill examines and challenges another of the interrelated elements of gender identified by Joan W. Scott: "normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities . . . [that] take the form of fixed binary opposition, categorically and unequivocally asserting the meaning of male and female, masculine and feminine" (1067). Through an exploration of such normative concepts as mother, father, wife, and husband, Churchill challenges gender stereotypes in an attempt to expand and liberate the metaphoric possibilities of both femininity and masculinity.

Through the women's maternal experiences, or lack thereof, Churchill explores and challenges the gender stereotype of an inherent maternal instinct.[8] Throughout the

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[8]I use the phrase *maternal instinct* here as defined by Barbara Mehrhof and Sheila Cronan in "The Origins of Woman's Oppression: One View" (Manuscript from Northwestern University Library, Evanston Illinois: 1969). This definition can be found in Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler's *Amazons, Bluestockings and Crones: a feminist dictionary* (London: Pandora, 1992): "A concept invented by males to ensure that we would fulfill our procreative duties as well as assuming full responsibility for children per se. 'Maternal instinct' is defined as follows: It is 'natural' for women to

first act, she reveals the complexities and ambiguities of motherhood, a theme central to both the act and the play as a whole. Of all the women, only Isabella Bird has not experienced motherhood at least once. Totally uninterpellated by the ideology of a maternal instinct, Isabella equates children with horses, revealing a decided preference for the latter when she tells Joan, "I never had any children. I was fond of horses" (72). In contrast, Dull Gret, with her ten children, at least one of whom was born "in a field" (71), experiences motherhood as an ongoing, continuous process. Dull Gret exemplifies the maternal experience of a vast majority of women, the kind of motherhood against which Charlotte Perkins Gilmam constructed *Herland* (1915), a motherhood "of helpless involuntary fecundity, forced to fill and overfill the land, every land, and then see their children suffer, sin, and die, fighting horribly with one another" (68). Indeed, involuntary fecundity, or at the very least unplanned pregnancy, affects all the mothers in the first act. If motherhood can be viewed as a continuum, Dull Gret and Isabella Bird occupy opposite ends of the spectrum, with the other Top Girls occupying various positions somewhere in the middle.

Lady Nijo and Patient Griselda share a similar maternal experience: the loss of children to patriarchy. Because she is a concubine, Nijo's children by the Emperor belong to him, while children by anyone else belong to the man and pose an extreme danger to both Nijo and the father. Hence, as Nijo explains to the other women, motherhood became for her a long succession of experiences of pain and loss which

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want to give birth and to go through any amount of pain and inconvenience in order to bear a child; it is 'natural' for women to love their children and to be willing to sacrifice anything for their benefit; therefore, women fulfill themselves through childbirth and raising children. This was solidified in the concept of maternal love" (261).

finally culminates in total annihilation of all maternal feeling:

> My first child was His Majesty's, which unfortunately died, but my second was Akebono's. . . . He cut the cord with a short sword, wrapped the baby in white and took it away. It was only a girl but I was sorry to lose it. . . . I saw my daughter once. She was three years old. . . . Akebono's wife had taken the child because her own died. . . . She was being brought up carefully so she could be sent to the palace like I was. . . . I never saw my third child after he was born, the son of Ariake the priest. . . . My fourth child was Ariake's too. . . . It was a boy again, my third son. But oddly enough I felt nothing for him. (70-72)

The reference to Nijo's daughter, whose loss is mourned despite her inferior gender, makes explicit the significant role of socialization in the perpetuation of gender oppression. Akebono's wife's appropriation and instruction of Nijo's daughter demonstrates how women themselves sometimes become agents of patriarchy in relation to other females. Even more telling, however, is the fact that Nijo so internalizes the patriarchal ideology whereby women have few rights in relation to men that she blames herself for her loss of maternal feelings, labelling it odd or unnatural. Not surprisingly, then, when she meets Griselda, someone who has shared a similar experience, Nijo attempts to validate her own odd numbness. Seeking corroboration, she twice asks Griselda: "But did you feel anything for the children?" (79). Griselda's offhand response, "Of course, I loved them" (79) serves not only to normalize an inherent maternalism, but to reinforce Nijo's sense of singularity and alienation. And yet, upon hearing about the return of Griselda's children, Nijo recognizes finally the injustice in

her own loss and, crying, exclaims: "Nobody gave me back my children" (79). Not coincidentally, Nijo's story about the collective female resistance on the eve of the Full Moon Ceremony follows almost immediately.

Like Nijo, Griselda also loses her children to their father. Explaining to Marlene that they were "Walter's child[ren] to do what he liked with" (77), Griselda reveals the extent to which she has been interpellated by the patriarchal ideology that holds that children belong to their fathers. The fate of Griselda's daughter, similar to that of Nijo's daughter, illustrates how female children are taught, often by other women, to accept a subordinate role. Although Walter had Griselda's children raised by someone else, "brought up secretly" (79), her ready acceptance of all Walter's edicts leads Griselda to participate actively in the subjugation of her own daughter. By unwittingly preparing her sixteen year-old daughter to take her place as the Marquis' wife, Griselda becomes a parody of the patriarchal ideal of selfless motherhood.

In contrast to the selfless Nijo and Griselda, Pope Joan and Marlene experience motherhood as little more than an inconvenient and largely unwanted physical condition. Joan, because she "wasn't used to having a woman's body" (70), refused to accept her pregnancy even when it is revealed to her by the chamberlain. Deluding herself, she hopes that by ignoring her pregnancy it will go away. As she explains to Marlene: "I didn't want to pay attention. It was easier to do nothing" (70). Of all the women, Marlene can most readily identify with Joan's experience. Like Joan, when Marlene becomes pregnant she procrastinates until it is too late to abort the fetus. Joyce, torn between love and resentment of both Marlene and Angie, mockingly reminds Marlene: "You was [sic] the most stupid, for someone so clever you was the most stupid, get

yourself pregnant, not go to the doctor, not tell" (134). Determined never to make the same mistake again, Marlene has "had two abortions" despite being "on the pill so long [she's] probably sterile" (135). While Joan and her child are "stoned to death" (71), Marlene and Angie are separated because of economic factors. Through the various maternal experiences, Churchill makes connections between having children stolen, like Nijo and Griselda; having children killed, like Joan; and having to choose between children and economic security, like Marlene. For these Top Girls, then, motherhood becomes an oppressive experience fraught with complexities and ambiguities impacted by social and economic realities.

While motherhood often culminates in female oppression and subjugation, however, fatherhood generally symbolizes autonomous masculine power and control. Interestingly, while the Top Girls never mention their mothers, references to fathers abound. Just as Nijo's and Griselda's children belong to the Emperor and Walter, so too Nijo and Griselda emerge as the property of their own fathers. Although merely observing a formality, both the Emperor and Walter reinforce patriarchal authority by asking the fathers' permission before marrying their daughters. Not surprisingly, then, when Walter expels Griselda, she returns to her father's house. Even the independent Isabella venerates her father, viewing him as "the mainspring of [her] life" (58). Echoing Nijo, Isabella always "tried to do what [her] father wanted" (57), and both she and Nijo owe their literary aspirations to their intellectual fathers.

Although Marlene remains silent during much of this discussion about fathers, as the play progresses it becomes apparent that she does not feel the same way about her father, whom she calls "that bastard" (138). In Act Three, during the confrontation with

Joyce. Marlene remembers her father as a drunken, violent man, not having seen or grasped the social and economic factors contributing to his abusiveness. Churchill, however, constructs the scene as "an historical event" so that, as Brecht suggests in "On the Use of Music in Epic Theatre" (1957), "Human behaviour is shown as alterable; man himself as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them" (86). Brecht's primary concern lies with the audience. When a scene is constructed as an historical event, Brecht argues, "the spectator is given the chance to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history. The idea is that the spectator should be put in a position where he can make comparisons about everything that influences the way in which human beings behave" (86). Through Joyce's defence of her father, then, Churchill explores the economic realities facing Marlene and Joyce's family. While not excusing the father's abusive behaviour, by presenting the social and economic factors contributing to his violence, Churchill enables the audience to make some interesting connections between patriarchal and economic oppression. As a normative concept, Churchill suggests, fatherhood, too, can become fraught with ambiguities and complexities which often oppress men as well as women.

The final normative concept explored by Churchill, marriage, emerges in the play as a patriarchal institution which serves men's interests more than women's. It is not by coincidence, the play suggests, that for generations Christian women's marriage vows included a promise to obey their husbands. Griselda, in fact, promises to "obey [Walter] in everything" (75) even before her marriage. Echoing Griselda's belief that "*of course* a wife must obey her husband," Isabella describes her marriage in similar terms: "I swore

to obey dear John, *of course*, but it didn't seem to arise. *Naturally* I wouldn't have wanted to go abroad while I was married" (75). As my added emphasis demonstrates, both Griselda and Isabella have been so interpellated by the patriarchal ideology of wifely obedience that they accept it as natural. Isabella's statement shows that as long as, and only as long as, women do exactly what their husbands want, the issue of obedience need not arise. Furthermore, as Griselda makes clear, asymmetrical hierarchies of power transcend class barriers. When she tells Marlene "I'd rather obey the Marquis than a boy from the village" (75), Griselda unknowingly echoes a sentiment expressed by Marlene who, in the final act, demands of Joyce, "What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who'd come home pissed? Don't you fucking this fucking that fucking bitch fucking tell me what to fucking do fucking" (133). Joan's explicit assertion, "I never obeyed anyone. They all obeyed me" (75), accents the tremendous gender gap in the politics of power. As a putative man, she had unlimited power and authority; at the moment her true gender was revealed she not only lost all authority but was killed for attempting to usurp masculine power. The marital experiences of the Top Girls serve as an unequivocal reminder that equality within marriage, while often constrained by other social and economic realities, depends primarily upon gender equity. The representation of the marital experience of the Top Girls, like their parental experiences, enables Churchill to examine and challenge many of the unique features of gender oppression.

To explore further the issue of oppression, Churchill also utilizes the Brechtian epic device of non-linear progression, what Brecht calls in his table distinguishing between Dramatic and Epic Theatre, "progression in curves" (37). If in epic theatre "the

linear story has been thrown on the scrap heap" (153), as Brecht suggests in "Notes on the Folk Play" (1950), then *Top Girls* is in this respect consistent with epic theatre. Although the play ends at the conclusion of Act Three, the story ends much sooner, at the conclusion of the last scene of Act Two. The final chronological statement in the play, Marlene's casual dismissal of Angie, "She's not going to make it" (120), appears cold and callous to the audience, who are as yet unsure that Angie is Marlene's own daughter. In her interview with Betsko and Koenig, Churchill warns that Marlene's second abandonment of her child should not be given too much significance:

> A lot of people have latched on to Marlene leaving her child, which interestingly was something that came very late. Originally the idea was just that Marlene was "writing off" her niece, Angie, because she'd never make it; I didn't yet have the plot idea that Angie was actually Marlene's own child. Of course women are pressured to make choices between working and having children in a way that men aren't, so it *is* relevant, but it isn't the main point of it. (82)

The "main point of it" does not become obvious until the end of Act Three, set one year earlier, when the audience can recognize and appreciate the full irony of Marlene's assertion: "She'll [Angie] be all right" (140). Although Marlene pronounces the final chronological line, the final words of the play itself are given by Churchill to Angie. Angie's painful cry of isolation and alienation "Frightening. . . . Frightening" (141), structurally echoes Kurtz's final exclamation in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "The horror! The horror!" (111), a culturally available symbol of evil in the world. Act Three, because it is a flashback to the previous year, allows the audience to view Angie's

cry, in light of Marlene's subsequent second abandonment, as an indictment of Marlene's self-interested individualism. After all, as Churchill explains to Betsko and Koenig, the play's agenda is first and foremost a *socialist* feminist one:

> What I was intending to do was to make it first look as though it was celebrating the achievements of women and then--by showing the main character, Marlene, being successful in a very competitive, destructive, capitalist way--ask, what kind of achievement is that? The idea was that it would start out looking like a feminist play and turn into a socialist one, as well. And I think on the whole it's mostly been understood like that. (82)

Once again privileging collective resistance, Churchill uses non-linear progression to instruct her audience, to demonstrate the futility of individual liberation without a concurrent commitment to liberation of the entire group. The play's non-linear progression allows Churchill to codify Marlene's casual dismissal of Angie as an extreme example of women reaching the top on the backs of other women, their own daughters included. This particular Brechtian epic device, the disruption of chronological time, becomes in *Top Girls* a useful device for the promotion of Churchill's socialist feminist message.

Another epic device utilized by Churchill, doubling, expedites her socialist feminist agenda by allowing her to make connections between different contexts, to suggest a continuity in women's history. Bertolt Brecht explains the purpose and effect of doubling when he discusses Charles Laughton's portrayal of Galileo in paragraph forty-nine of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1948):

> the actor appears on the stage in a double role, as Laughton and as Galileo . . . the showman Laughton does not disappear in the Galileo whom he is showing; from which this way of acting gets its name of 'epic'--comes to mean simply that the tangible, matter-of-fact process is no longer hidden behind a veil . . . Of course, the audience would not forget Laughton if he attempted the full change of personality, in that they would admire him for it; but they would in that case miss his own opinions and sensations, which would have been completely swallowed up by the character. (194)

Although Brecht speaks about the doubling between an actor and a single character, Churchill extends her doubling to an actor with numerous characters. Churchill's doubling serves a two-fold purpose: it helps the audience make connections among all the characters played by any one actor and, by making visible the tangible process of the play's construction, it prevents the audience from being "completely swallowed up by" the characters. As Churchill explains to Linda Fitzsimmons in *File on Churchill* (1989), "the audience can enjoy the medium and appreciate the theatricality rather than over-identifying with the characters" (61). For Churchill, then, doubling, too, becomes an alienation effect useful to her socialist feminist agenda.

Of all the characters, Marlene alone, as the symbolic representative of self-interested individualism, is not doubled. The other Top Girls of the first act are doubled with at least one, and often two other characters. Pope Joan, for example, is doubled with Louise, a forty-six-year-old woman who comes to the Top Girls Employment Agency as a client. In an interview with Win, Louise explains that she has "spent twenty years in middle management [and] seen young men who [she] trained go on, in [her]

own company, or elsewhere, to higher things" (106). Like Joan, who "didn't live a women's life" and did not "understand it" (78), Louise remains alienated from other women. Distancing herself from "the girls" with whom she works, Louise attempts to transform herself into an honorary man: "I don't care greatly for working with women. I think I pass as a man at work" (106). And yet, although both she and Joan attempt to pass as men, ultimately neither succeeds. They may be Top Girls, the play suggests, but they are still girls, restricted by insurmountable obstacles meant to keep women in their rightful place: in a subordinate role in relation to men. By doubling Pope Joan and Louise, then, Churchill encourages the audience to challenge Marlene's espousal of the nineteen-eighties as a period of post-feminist idealism, symbolically represented for her in the high-powered managing director "who's got two children [and] breast feeds in the board room" (134). Making connections between Joan and Louise, Churchill urges the audience to question the extent of women's liberation over the last eleven centuries.

Similarly, by doubling the roles of Lady Nijo and Win, Churchill makes some interesting connections between a medieval courtesan and a twentieth-century, liberated career woman. Nijo, who lives only for "the Emperor's favour" and "to wear thin silk" (66), spends her life in the service of unavailable and/or married men who disappoint and abuse her. Win, who supported one man for four years and who has an ex-husband in jail, is currently involved with a married man who spends time with her only when "his wife [is] visiting her mother" (99). Like Akebono and Ariake, Nijo's lovers who attempt to conceal their affairs, Win's lover makes her "lie down in the back of the car so the neighbours [won't] see [her] going in" (103). Tragically, like Nijo, who not only accepts but cherishes and promotes her role as a sexual object, Win discounts the

humiliation to which she is subjected and characterizes her affair as a "bit of fun" (104). Like many contemporary feminists, Churchill questions the extent to which the much vaunted sexual liberation of the 1960s has actually been liberating to women.[9] Win's story suggests that sexual liberation often serves men's interests more than, and even at the expense of, women's interests.

Another set of doubling, that between Patient Griselda, Jeanine, and Nell, emphasizes differences rather than similarities. Like Griselda, who in every instance accedes to masculine authority, Jeanine allows Marlene's negative assessment of her work--"Speeds, not brilliant, not too bad" (84)--to undermine her confidence to the extent that she foregoes her desire for better "prospects" and "travel," and applies instead for a position in a lampshade company. Upon hearing about Jeanine's engagement, Marlene validates patriarchal discrimination against women in the work place and dismisses Jeanine as a serious candidate for a future in an executive position. Tragically, Jeanine accepts Marlene's valuation and settles for a position little better than her current one. In contrast, the fiercely independent Nell rejects "play[ing] house" in favour of "go[ing] on working and not marry[ing]" (102). Upon hearing about Win's

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[9]Many contemporary feminists, like Churchill, see sexual liberation and the sexual revolution as little more than the same old "man-vision." For example, Roxanne Dunbar calls sexual liberation "the most insidious device of all for brainwashing females"; Karen Linsey sees it as a "tragic farce for women;" and Gloria Steinem suggests that it "simply meant women's increased availability on men's terms." Sally Roesch Wagner insists that "the so-called 'sexual revolution' should not be confused with actual sexual liberation. True sexual freedom will be possible only when we break the connection between sex and power, when there is no power component in sexual interactions. The sexual revolution has never revolted against patterns of power between women and men" (*Amazons, Bluestockings and Crones* London: Pandora, 1992) 416-417. Through the doubling of Nijo and Win, Churchill suggests that gendered inequities of power have remained relatively stable over more than five centuries and at least two waves of feminist liberation.

exploits with her married lover. Nell exclaims "Fuck that for a joke" (103) and threatens to reveal the affair to the man's wife. And yet, despite the pleasure of seeing the actor who played the downtrodden Griselda and Jeanine assert her autonomy and sovereignty, the audience eventually realizes that Nell is no more to be emulated than is Marlene. Believing that women require "balls" if they are to succeed in the labour market, Nell dedicates her life to disproving what she perceives as a masculine under-evaluation of women: "They think we're too nice. They think we listen to the buyer's doubts. They think we consider his needs and feelings" (115). Nell, determined to succeed at all costs, emulates the men she so envies, and considers the needs and feelings of no one but herself. Upon hearing of Howard's heart attack, apparently triggered by his disappointment over losing the management position to Marlene, Nell callously dismisses him by declaring: "Lucky he didn't get the job if that's what his health's like" (120). Additionally, telling Marlene, "I don't like coming second" (104), Nell reveals that she aspired to Marlene's position. When Win tells Marlene: "We'd rather it was you than Howard. We're glad for you, aren't we Nell?" she reluctantly and insincerely replies, "Oh yes. Aces" (104). For Nell, feminist solidarity occupies a distant second in relation to personal achievement. By doubling Nell with Griselda and Jeanine, then, Churchill suggests that the kind of individual achievement towards which Nell aspires is no more liberating to women collectively than the total submission demonstrated by Griselda and Jeanine.

Similarly, by doubling the roles of Isabella Bird, Joyce, and Mrs. Kidd, Churchill connects women like Isabella, who live as honorary men, with women like Mrs. Kidd and Joyce, who make masculine independence possible. While Isabella travels

independently, Mrs. Kidd and Joyce resemble the stay-at-home Hennie and live out lives largely confined to the domestic sphere. Mrs. Kidd, given no proper name in the play, is defined solely in relation to her husband. An abused wife interpellated by patriarchal ideology which views women who are successful in the public sphere as "ballbreakers," Mrs. Kidd resembles Joyce because both "bear the brunt" (112) of Marlene's success. And yet, despite apparent differences, Joyce and Mrs. Kidd share certain experiences with Isabella. Mrs. Kidd's tendency to "put [Howard] first every inch of the way" (112) resembles Isabella's willing surrender of independence upon her marriage. Both Mrs. Kidd, who experiences physical and emotional abuse, and Isabella, who is unable "to cope with the ordinary drudgery of life" and consequently experiences "carbuncles on the spine and nervous prostration" (65), suffer under oppressive, patriarchal regimes. Additionally, neither Joyce nor Isabella has children of her own, and both express their strong love for their fathers and adopt their fathers' belief systems. Isabella, the daughter of an Anglican minister, demonstrates her allegiance to her father's religion and asserts, "I am of course a member of the Church of England" (59). She bristles when she suspects Joan of "calling the Church of England a heresy" (60), and appears ready for a fight. Similarly, Joyce so adopts and espouses her father's socialist ideology that she is mocked by Marlene: "Bosses still walking on the workers' faces? Still Dadda's little parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself?" (138). Like Isabella, who is ready to fight for her beliefs, Joyce refuses Marlene's offer of reconciliation because she believes it would be a betrayal of her father and everything for which he stood. Having one actor play all three roles, then, allows Churchill to explore major differences among women while at the same time recognizing commonalities of

experience grounded in gender. By connecting Isabella, Joyce, and Mrs. Kidd, Churchill encourages the audience to examine the exceptional women of history in the context of the struggle and oppression experienced by the majority of women.

Through the doubling of Dull Gret and Angie, Churchill offers the slight possibility of collective, feminist resistance. Angie, relegated to remedial classes and characterized by Marlene as "a bit thick . . . a bit funny" (121), resembles Gret in more ways than mere dullness. Like Gret, who except when talking about her exploits in Hell utters short, coarse phrases such as "Big cock" (68), "In a field, yah" (71), and Balls!" (73), Angie personifies inarticulate anger. Angie's unprepossessing characteristics seem to bear out Marlene's assertion that "She's not going to make it" (120). And yet, in an interview with Laurie Stone entitled "Caryl Churchill: Making Room at the Top" (1983), Churchill challenges Marlene's criteria for success. Revealing her fantasy that in the future Angie realizes Marlene's "values are false" and becomes "a bricklayer in a feminist collective" (81), Churchill suggests that women's liberation must include all women, even those relegated to the lowest spheres of society, and that every woman has something to offer towards collective, feminist resistance. By doubling Angie with Gret, then, Churchill mitigates somewhat Angie's final exclamation of despair and suggests a slight hope for Angie's future.

Interestingly, one set of connected roles, that of the waitress, Kit, and Shona, includes no Top Girl. Just as Churchill presents the waitress in the first act as a silent contrast to the Top Girls, so too Shona and Kit represent the majority of women who, despite their struggle, may never achieve Top Girl status. Shona, by almost convincing Nell of her work experience, and Kit, by her ambition to become a nuclear physicist,

demonstrate that female aspirations persist despite on-going restrictions. Unfortunately, like Louise, who experiences age discrimination because of her advanced years, Shona experiences discrimination because of her youth. Kit, despite her belief that she is "clever" and "old for [her] age" (97), must find a way to overcome her lower-class background if she is to achieve success. By having the same actor play the waitress, Shona, and Kit, then, Churchill juxtaposes the Top Girls with their less fortunate sisters. As long as some women remain in a struggle to overcome poverty and oppression, the play suggests, individual female achievements such as those of the Top Girls remain futile and empty for women in general.

Clearly, then, in *Top Girls* Churchill uses doubling to facilitate her engagement with new history. She uses doubling, like the other alienation effects such as visually jarring characters and costumes, and non-linear progression, to explore and challenge the relationship between the past and current cultural practices. Sharing Scott's definition of gender, Churchill interrogates the role of gender and class as social constructs and attempts to make a place in history for all women, not just Top Girls like those of the first act. Making explicit the major division between social solidarity and individual achievement, Churchill utilizes Brechtian epic devices to forward her socialist feminist belief in collective resistance as the only possible way forward for women.

CHAPTER SIX

I won't turn back for you or anyone. (Fen)

Using numerous Brechtian epic devices, Churchill constructs *Fen* (1983) as a site of resistance and redefinition of dominant discourse. Like drama in general, *Fen* has the potential to become a powerful locus for the construction of new and more positive forms of gendered subjectivity than the hegemonic forms. 'Subjectivity' refers to the thoughts and emotions of individuals whether conscious and unconscious, to the way in which they understand themselves and their relationship to the world. And, as Teresa De Lauretis suggests, individuals are always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity which are constantly being reconstituted in a wide range of discursive fields: "The construction of gender also goes on, if less obviously, in the academy, in the intellectual community, in avant-garde artistic practices and radical theories, even, and indeed especially, in feminism" (3). Because representations of gender are absorbed subjectively by everyone her plays address, the implications of Churchill's socialist feminism are serious and far-reaching. Louis Althusser argues in his influential text "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971) that language functions for individuals by *interpellating* them as subjects, that is, constituting their subjectivity for them in language. Language, in the form of what Althusser calls "ideology in general," makes subjectivity appear obvious to the individual. He argues that interpellation of individuals as subjects is a structural feature of all ideology.

> I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey you there! (161)

Interpellation is also a process of misrecognition, misattribution, and/or misappropriation in that individuals assume they are the *authors* of the ideology that constructs their subjectivity. They imagine they are in control of meaning, that they are indeed the type of subject the ideology or discourse proposes. It is this identification with subjective identity that causes so much concern for feminists. Socialist feminists, applying Marxist models of ideology to gender relations, link ideology with material interests and identify ideology's role in the reproduction of specific forms of gendered power relations in society. Because language, in the form of conflicting discourses, contributes to the constitution of subjectivity, feminist discourses offer a discursive space from which individuals can resist, and be seen to resist, dominant subject positions. Feminist discourses such as Churchill's *Fen* enable subjects to decenter their interpellated selves, abandon the belief in essential subjectivity, and in that way open up their subjectivity to change. Like Piscator and Brecht, Churchill uses the stage as a vehicle for social change. But where Brecht and Piscator limited themselves to the relationship between social class and social conflicts, Churchill insists on the interrelation among class, gender, race, sexual orientation, and age. Churchill's *Fen*, then, has the potential to be a powerful productive force in the construction of gendered

subjectivity.

Churchill wrote *Fen* in 1983 in conjunction with the Joint Stock Theatre Group, and they adopted many of the epic methods used by the Company in other productions, such as *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976) and *Cloud Nine* (1979). In an interview with Geraldine Cousin, published under the title "The Common Imagination and the Individual Voice" (1988), Churchill explains the collaborative method of *Fen*'s production: "We spent two weeks living in a cottage in the Fens, meeting people, and talking about their lives, and then one week in London. That final week we discussed what we'd found out and what we wanted in the play" (6). This collaborative working method, in which the entire production crew works toward a common vision, eliminates hierarchies and results in a truly communal effort wherein the collective supports and strengthens each individual. As Churchill explains, "It's a matter of having a director and actors with whom you can share certain assumptions and not have to feel that you are constantly the one to be trying to push things in the direction you want them to go" (Fitzsimmons 86). This collectivity does not mean, however, that the playwright's function is eliminated or subsumed. The workshop method of production is not synonymous with improvisation; the playwright still has an important, individual role to fulfil.

Churchill understood that the end of a workshop signalled the beginning of the difficult task of pulling together a wide range of diverse material. In an interview with Emily Mann, published in Betsko and Koenig's *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* (1987), Churchill explains what happened after the *Fen* workshop:

Fen is the most documentary of the plays, I suppose. We didn't use tape

recorders. We went off to stay in a village and everyone would go out each day and talk to people and make notes or remember. . . . So I was left with a lot of notes and quotes and things different people had said. But never a whole speech, just lines here and there. And I didn't make any characters who were based on a single person. (80)

In practical terms, this means, for example, that Churchill integrated her notes about a gangmaster who preferred women workers over men into the interaction in Scene Twelve between Mr Tewson, the land owner, and the women farm workers:

TEWSON: You're good workers, I'll say that for you.

NELL: Thank you very much.

TEWSON: Better workers than men. I've seen women working in my fields with icicles on their faces. I admire that.

SHIRLEY: Better than men all right.

NELL: Bloody fools, that's all. (171)

Using her notes about the gangmaster who preferred women workers because "They'd work even with icicles on their faces" (Cousin 6), Churchill presents a bleak, stark picture of the unremitting labour of the fen women. Churchill's portrayal of Mr Tewson's "admiration" for the women who work "his" fields demonstrates the exploitive, paternalistic relationship resulting from class and gender inequities.

Shirley's pride in being "better than men," in women's endurance, stands in sharp contrast to Nell's recognition that women who willingly endure extreme hardships so as to enrich their bosses are nothing more than "bloody fools." Nell evinces her awareness of class inequities by suggesting that, like Mr. Tewson's friend, all the upper classes

should commit suicide: "Best hope if they all top themselves. Start with the queen and work down and I'll tell them when to stop" (172). In a reversal of class roles, Nell imaginatively appropriates the power of life and death decision-making once associated with the monarchy. Unlike Nell, Shirley agrees with Mr. Tewson when he suggests that his friend's death is a tragedy. Having been effectively interpellated by the capitalist ideology that naturalizes labourers owing unswerving allegiance to the owners of the means of production, Shirley acquiesces in her own oppression. Nowhere does this become more obvious than at the end of the scene when, as Nell, Alice, Angela, and Becky abandon their work when the rain begins to "splinter" their faces, Shirley not only remains working, but exalts in her ability to do so, exclaiming "I can" (173). Shirley's pride in her ability to endure has serious implications within a socialist feminist theoretical framework because, as Churchill tells Mann, the character of Shirley is largely based on an actual fen woman: "There were a lot of things from one particular woman that went into the character Shirley, who's always working, about pride in working hard and not giving up, lines like 'I didn't want my mother to think she'd bred a gibber'" (80). Instantiating the *interpellation* of which Althusser speaks, real women currently living in the fens share Shirley's acceptance, indeed even embracing a bleak and dreary female existence.

One epic technique Churchill uses effectively in *Fen* to demonstrate how women are interpellated by patriarchal, capitalist ideology is episodic structure. In paragraph sixty-five of his "Appendices to the Short Organum," Brecht explains the advantages of such structure:

For a genuine story to emerge it is most important that the scenes should

> to start with be played quite simply one after another, using the experience of real life, without taking account of what follows or even of the play's overall sense. The story then unreels in a contradictory manner; the individual scenes retain their own meaning; they yield (and simulate) a wealth of ideas; and their sum, the story, unfolds authentically without any cheap all-pervading idealization (one word leading to another) or directing of subordinate, purely functional component parts to an ending in which everything is resolved. (278-79)

In Churchill's *Fen*, the almost continuous action results in a type of live montage. Each scene stands completely on its own and "retains its own meaning," yet each correlates to the others so the story unfolds as a complex, inter-connected unity. Because many of the scenes represent "the experience of real life" as lived by the fen women, Churchill's play "unfolds authentically" and leaves many things unresolved because they are unresolvable in lived reality. Believing most strongly in the politics of the personal, Churchill uses all the resources of her drama to replicate as far as a dramatist can the personal lived reality of the fen women so as to demonstrate the unfavourable position of women within capitalist, patriarchal societies. By her faithful representation of the fen women's lives, she attempts to instill in her audience a desire for social change. Clearly then, Churchill finds the Brechtian epic tradition of episodic structure an effective medium for her socialist feminist message.

One reason Churchill describes *Fen* as the most documentary of the plays may lie in the fact that Mary Chamberlain's *Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village* (1975) became one of the play's main sources. As Churchill tells Mann, "We

read the book *Fen Women* [sic] by Mary Chamberlain before we went and during the workshop. And by the end of the workshop we had all focused on women land workers and knew the kind of issues it might be about" (80-81). In the preface to her text, Chamberlain explains that she wrote *Fenwomen* "as history, [as] a political book even though its analysis and argument were implicit and its polemic not overt" (2). Not surprisingly, then, Churchill's *Fen*, derived extensively from Chamberlain's book, assumes a somewhat historical, documentary form. Indeed, several pivotal images in the play come directly from Chamberlain's oral history. The "fen tigers" described in the opening scene by Mr. Takai, the Japanese businessman whose corporation now owns sixty-five per cent of the fens, is a case in point. Churchill's seemingly contradictory insertion of a Japanese businessman into the rural, supposedly pastoral setting of the English fens works as an alienation effect. The audience, struck by the incongruity of the scene, desires to understand and thus anxiously awaits Mr. Takai's opening speech:

> Not true people had webbed feet but did walk on stilts. Wild people, fen tigers. In 1630 rich lords planned to drain fen, change swamp into grazing land, far thinking men, brave investors. Fen people wanted to keep fishes and eels to live on, no vision. Refuse work on drainage, smash dykes, broke sluices. Many problems. . . . (147)

The image of these "fen tigers" who travel the marshes on stilts and attack the "far thinking" capitalists comes directly from Chamberlain's text. Speaking about the attempts at drainage in the seventeenth century, Chamberlain asserts:

> It was bitterly opposed by the fen dwellers, for drainage destroyed their

> fisheries and in many areas was tantamount to enclosure. . . . The scheme was rigorously opposed--dykes were breached and ditches filled and many fen legends tell of the triumph of the fen 'Tigers'--as they were nicknamed--in sabotaging the system. . . . The Romans considered the area ungovernable and were outwitted by the cunning fen dwellers who could travel on stilts across the marshes, a skill which the Romans failed to master. (14-15)

These "fen tigers," symbolic of collective resistance and opposition, become a central image in Churchill's play. In Scene Sixteen, for example, the ninety-year-old Ivy reminisces about the unionisation efforts of the fen labourers: "When they were dredging the mud out of the leat. I can picture the gantry clear as a bell. . . . 'Are you the bloody union man?' he'd say to Jack. 'Are you the bloody union man? And Jack'd say 'Are you going to pay him, because if not I'll splash it all over'" (177). Ivy's reminiscence of the struggle between the "union men" and the "gantry" concretizes the struggle between the fen dwellers and the capitalist land owners such as Mr. Tewson. Similarly, Nell's walk across the stage on stilts in the final scene connects her to the wild fen tigers described by Mr. Takai. Her bold declaration of liberation spoken to the sun, "I won't turn back for you or anyone" (189), reflects a small but realistic hope of social change in the political climate of Thatcherite Britain during the 1980s.

Having used the image of the fen tigers to demonstrate the reality of class struggle, Churchill utilizes another image from Chamberlain's book to demonstrate the need for social change in the area of gender politics. In Scene Seven of *Fen*, Nell, after being teased and called a "morphrodite" by Becky, Deb, and Shona, encloses the latter

in a rabbit hutch. One of the fen women Mary Chamberlain interviews, a widow of eighty-three named Gladys Otterspoor, recounts her childhood experiences with the woman everyone in the village thought of as a hermaphrodite:

> There was another character we were frightened on. She was what we used to call an old man-woman--a morphrodite. It was hard to tell whether she were a man or a woman. And she used to wear a funny old hat. She weren't married. . . . And once I jumped over the wall and were picking the walnuts, and she caught me and took me down to her land and put me in one of those little cages what they keep the birds in. I couldn't stand up or nothing. (37-8)

Nell, an unmarried women who wears "funny" masculine clothes, like the other "morphrodite" recalled by Otterspoor, becomes the object of ridicule and scorn because of her independent, single status. Her failure to fulfil the expected roles of wife and mother results in ostracism and deprecation. Ironically, Nell's tormentors consist of Deb and Shona, whose own mother, Val, abdicates her duties as wife and mother in order to live with her lover, Frank; and of Becky, whose stepmother, Angela, is a child-abuser. Yet neither Val nor Angela receives the disparaging epithet "hermaphrodite." Presumably only women who cannot be defined in relation to men risk being so labelled even when they fail to fulfill their gender roles in other respects. The three girls, having been interpellated by patriarchal norms of masculinity and femininity, police Nell's seemingly deviant behaviour, eventually pushing her to commit violence against Shona.

The image of Shona in a cage presents a visual image of the confining, stifling position of women within capitalist, patriarchal societies, but ironically it is a woman

who does the enclosing. Presenting Nell, a surrogate man, as the instrument of Shona's imprisonment allows Churchill to explore the issue of violence, especially violence against and by women, a theme which anticipates *A Mouthful of Birds*' (1986) focus on women and violence. Nell is closely connected with one of the two murders of women in the play. Nell, known for her "dirty stories [and] frightening ones" (164), tells Shirley, Angela, and Alice the story of her grandfather's childhood experience with a murderer. In doing so, Nell replicates sexual stereotypes which tend to naturalize male aggression against women. Sexual stereotypes can best be understood as social constructs or *inventions*.[1] Viewing gender as an invention helps elucidate the general constructedness of gender-specific roles, of sexual stereotypes. So much of what subjectively makes up the categories of women and men (wife/husband, mother/father, adulteress/adulterer), consists of constructs associated with what is appropriate. Stereotypes claim to be *a priori* sexual differences which are not constructs, but rather *natural* human traits; they pretend to be what is natural, real, and eternal. Continual repetition of sexual stereotypes effectively conceals both the inventedness of the construct and the power relations behind the invention. Nell's unconscious repetition of sexual stereotypes, then, reproduces ideology which functions as interpellation.

In Nell's grandfather's tale, the faithless wife who attempts to murder her husband with rat poison, the stereotypical weapon of choice for women, receives just punishment at the hands of her husband. Both Nell and Shirley find it "[f]unny if it is

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[1]I am greatly indebted to Werner Sollors for his analysis of terms such as *ethnicity*, *nationalism*, and *race* as inventions. I found particularly useful the introduction to his *The Invention of Ethnicity* (Oxford UP, 1989) which helped clarify my understanding of gender as a social construct.

true" (167) that the cuckold "stitched together" (166) the adulterous couple with a pitchfork. Having been interpellated by patriarchal ideology which naturalizes a husband's exclusive rights to his wife's body, neither Nell or Shirley questions the husband's right to murder his unfaithful wife. For them, this man's violence against his wife becomes merely the source of humour. Angela, who contemplates adultery with Frank, fails to see the humour in Nell's tale. And yet, in some ways she is more like the husband than the wife in the story. After he kills his wife and her lover, the husband tells Nell's grandfather: "if you talk about it I'll find you and slit your throat from ear to ear" (166). Similarly, when Becky threatens to tell her father or someone else about the abuse she suffers, Angela warns her: "You can't tell because I'd kill you" (154). By having the husband and Angela issue almost identical threats, Churchill demonstrates how women, in an attempt to repudiate socially prescribed submissive behaviours, sometimes become violently aggressive themselves. Angela, after forcing Becky to drink boiling water, mocks: "No stamina, have you? 'Sorry Angela.' What you made of, girl?" (154). Angela, having been interpellated by the ideology that equates violence with power, views any kind of submission as a sign of weakness. And yet, as Churchill makes explicit in the final scene, Angela too is a victim of her own violence:

> Becky, do you feel it? I don't, not yet. There's a pain somewhere. I can see so far and nothing's coming. I stand in a field and I'm not there. I have to make something happen. I can hurt you, can't I? You feel it, don't you? Let me burn you. I have to hurt you worse. I think I can feel something. It's my own pain. I must be here if it hurts. (189)

Although Angela feels powerful when she can "make something happen," that power is transitory at best. In the debased and sordid world in which she lives, only her pain and suffering tell Angela that she is alive. Instead of giving her power, her resorting to violence results only in disempowerment and disillusionment.

Nowhere does the futility of violence become more explicit in the play than in the outcome of the unprovoked attack on Nell by Becky, Deb, and Shona. Replicating Angela's acts of violence, Becky attacks Nell with a hoe and repeats Angela's threat almost verbatim: "I'll kill you. Kill you with the hoe. You're horrible" (156). The placement of this scene, immediately following the scene in which Angela tortures and threatens Becky, allows Churchill to demonstrate the cyclical nature of verbal and physical abuse. And yet Becky's final words to Angela, her final line in the play, suggest the possibility that she might break free from the cycle of abuse: "You can't, I won't, I'm not playing. You're not here" (189). Although Becky's refusal to play and her denial of Angela's presence could be read as merely a child's refusal to face reality, the fact remains that her words produce concrete results: "ANGELA *goes*" (189). Through Becky, Churchill injects a modicum of optimism by suggesting that the cycle of violence can be broken.

Through the other murder in the play, that of Val by Frank, Churchill demonstrates how Val, torn between two conflicting desires, to live with her children or to live with her lover, seeks release through death. Unable to kill herself, she requests Frank's assistance. He is a logical choice not only because they are lovers, but because, as Angela's bawdy poem demonstrates, he once attempted suicide himself:

Frank was miserable and wished he was dead.

He had horrible thoughts in his head.

He took some pills to end his life.

Too bad he got saved by his silly wife. Not his wife. . . . (184)

Because Frank too has seen death as a possible alternative to a life of misery, Val feels comfortable in asking his assistance. However, even though Val needs Frank's help, she wants to retain the power to script her own death. Going so far as to "mark the place [where the knife should go in] with a biro," Val directs Frank: "Just say you love me and put the knife in and hold me till it's over" (186). Although he says he loves her and therefore cannot kill her, Frank eventually accedes to Val's request. He does not, however, kill her in the gentle manner she requests. Instead, he savagely attacks her with an axe:

FRANK: Aren't you cold? I'm shivering. Let's have a fire and some tea.

Eh, Val?

FRANK picks up the axe and is about to go out.

Remember--

VAL: What?

FRANK: Early on. It wasn't going to be like this.

Silence.

Why do you--?

VAL: What?

FRANK: All right then. All right.

He kills her with the axe.

He puts her body in the wardrobe. (187)

Instead of dying romantically in the arms of her lover, Val dies violently after some vague, inarticulate accusation from Frank, "Why do you--?" Her desire to achieve a measure of control over her own death, a control she lacked throughout her life, is thwarted by Frank's extempore violence. Frank transforms her carefully scripted suicide, in which she is the instigator and Frank the facilitator, into a murder in which he alone makes all the decisions except who is to be the victim. Like the husband in Nell's story, Frank retains autonomous power over life and death decisions involving *his* woman, while Val dies subject to his patriarchal authority.

One of the ways Churchill reveals the continuity and circularity of women's oppression is through her portrayal of Nell's tormentors as little girls. Scene Seven ends with Becky, Deb, and Shona singing the "Girls' Song," which serves to disrupt the flow of the action. In his "Short Organum" (1948), Brecht explicates the efficacy of songs as epic theatre devices: "It emphasizes the general gest of showing, which always underlies that which is being shown, when the audience is musically addressed by means of songs" (203). In their song, the three girls embrace the gender roles prescribed for them by a culturally, emotionally, and economically impoverished community. But as Mary Chamberlain explains, their absorption of such stereotypical gender roles is hardly accidental; fen girls are early socialized into gender-specific, nurturing, but otherwise demeaning roles:

> Rural childhood has changed. But capitalism abhors a vacuum. . . . Advertising and consumerism have taken over where child labour left off. 'Boys will be boys' and are left to play. But the girls are little Mummies at four, with plastic babies and toy hoovers. And big girls at

> eleven, with boyfriends, makeup and cigarettes. Domestic responsibility is given them early. They live for the day when they reach maturity and have a home of their own. And repeat the pattern with their daughters. Early work, early training. Cheap domestic labour. Childhood for girls has not changed. It still ends early. (26)

Through their song, Becky, Deb, and Shona demonstrate their allegiance to the restricted, enclosed lives for which they have been trained: "But I don't think I'll leave the village when I grow up. / I'm never going to leave the village when I grow up even when I get married" (157). And just as they automatically assume they will get married, they envision their futures in terms of traditionally feminine occupations such as "nurse, hairdresser, teacher, cook, and housewife" (157-58). Churchill uses the "Girls' Song" to show how little the lives of women have changed in the fens from the seventeenth-century to the present. She demonstrates not only the continuity of women's oppression, but how women themselves become implicated in their own subjection. Her play becomes what Michel Foucault, in his influential text *The History of Sexuality, Volume One, An Introduction* (1981) identifies as *reverse discourse*. According to Foucault, the possibility of resistance to dominant ideology is an effect of reverse discourse. As he suggests, "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (101). Churchill's reverse discourse, then, challenges existing meaning and power by producing a new, resistant discourse. By exposing how gender roles are socially constructed, Churchill makes possible their deconstruction and challenges their ability to recruit homogeneous subjects through interpellation. Through the "Girl's Song,"

Churchill exposes the nature of gender as a social construct, and in the process opens up the possibility for social change.

Churchill also interrogates the role of one of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) most strongly implicated in the support and reproduction of gender stereotypes: the family. Although interested in the role of both men and women in the social construction of gender, as can be seen in Scene Eleven, when Geoffrey lectures his wife, Shirley, and Val on the "Declining morals all round" (170), Churchill's primary concern lies with mother/daughter relationships. Churchill presents the relationship between Becky and Angela, for example, as an entirely dysfunctional one. Interestingly, theirs is not the only step-mother/step-child relationship negatively portrayed. As Nell demonstrates in her story, her grandfather experienced abuse at the hands of his surrogate step-mother, his father's live-in mistress. And yet even in abusive situations, Churchill suggests, the mother/daughter relationship is the more volatile. Becky, as she explains in the final scene, experiences extreme physical and emotional abuse: "Angela beats me. She shuts me in the dark. She put a cigarette on my arm" (189). Nell's grandfather, on the other hand, experienced a milder form of abuse; his step-mother "hated him, and she'd send him to bed without any tea . . . " (164). And yet, although a mere child of ten, as a male he has the option of "run[ning] off," of escaping from an abusive situation and making his own way in the world. Sixteen-year-old Becky, having been successfully interpellated by the ideology that suggests fen girls "never . . . leave the village," is trapped. Churchill's negative portrayal of step-mother/step-child relationships, then, allows her to demonstrate that in areas of capitalist patriarchy, even within dysfunctional families, males occupy a privileged position in relation to females.

More importantly, her representation allows Churchill to interrogate the strongly intertwined bond between mothers and daughters.

At times, Churchill appears to extol the mother/daughter relationship. Because all mothers are also daughters, motherhood involves women in a double identification, with their daughters and with their mothers. This identification extends to grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and even great-great-grandmothers as can be seen when Shirley speaks about her grandmother's grandmother in the final scene. Nowhere is the matrilineal interconnection made more explicit than in Scene Eight wherein Val interacts with her mother, May, and her daughters, Deb and Shona. Throughout the scene, all the negative exhortations refer to specific familial relationships:

VAL: Don't speak to your nan like that.

DEB: You shut up, / none of your business.

MAY: Don't speak to your mum like that. . . .

VAL: Don't start on me. Just because you had nothing.

MAY: Don't speak to me like that, / my girl, or it's out you go.

DEB: Don't speak to my mum.

VAL: I've not been here / five minutes.

DEB: Don't speak to my nan.

VAL: Shut up, Deb.

MAY: Don't speak to the child like that.

SHONA *screams and runs off. Silence.*

Don't go after her. . . .

Deb, you go and look after your sister. (159-60)

All the women except Shona, who at six is too young to understand but not too young to be upset, iterate and reiterate their familial connections. Although unable to disguise their bitterness and resentment, each comes to the defence of the other. Deb, hurt and angry because her mother left the girls to go to live with Frank, still refuses to allow May to insult Val. Similarly, May, embarrassed and ashamed because Val abandoned her children, defends Val when Deb speaks rudely to her. Indeed, like Shirley, who often babysits her numerous grandchildren, May refuses to allow her disappointment with Val's behaviour to prevent her from providing daycare for Deb and Shona. The absence of men from these familial scenes (Val's husband is mentioned but never seen) allows Churchill to concentrate her attention upon the way women repeat their mother/daughter histories from one generation to the next. Through her representation of this primary relationship, Churchill suggests that regardless of whatever else may divide women, the mother/daughter relationship always holds the potential for a type of female solidarity.

However, while on the one hand Churchill appears to extol the mother/daughter relationship, on the other she recognizes the role of mothers in the socialization of children. Andrea Dworkin, in her radical text *Right-wing Women* (1983), goes so far as to suggest that mothers act as stormtroopers for the patriarchy:

> Mothers raise daughters to conform to the strictures of the conventional female life as defined by men, whatever the ideological values of the men. Mothers are the immediate enforcers of male will, the guards at the cell door, the flunkies who administer the electric shocks to punish

rebellion . . . Rebellion can rarely survive the aversion therapy that passes for being brought up female. (15)

Churchill continually demonstrates her awareness of mothers as the enforcers of patriarchal ideology. May admonishes Deb, "Don't speak to your mum like that" (159) in an attempt to teach Deb respect for a parent. This is not to suggest, however, that May approves of Val's relationship with Frank. Immediately prior to this exchange with Deb, May criticizes Val in Deb's presence:

MAY: How long is this nonsense going to last?

VAL: Don't.

MAY: I'm ashamed of you.

VAL: Not in front.

MAY: What you after? Happiness? Got it have you? Bluebird of happiness? Got it have you? Bluebird?

Silence.

What you after? (159)

Categorizing Val's affair as nonsense, May attempts to coerce Val into compliance with normative behaviour for fen women. Trying to create shame using sarcasm, she admonishes Val to fulfil her expected roles of wife and mother. Through her sarcastic question about the Bluebird of happiness, May suggests that illicit romance is not the route to true happiness. However, by ridiculing Val she also reinforces the ideology which suggests that women do not deserve, and indeed should not expect, happiness. This theme is repeated most strikingly in Scene Eleven when, immediately following Val's recitation of her own unhappinesses, Shirley tells her baby granddaughter:

"Nothing's perfect is it, my poppet? There's a good girl" (169). Before the baby can even talk, Shirley teaches her not to expect happiness and reinforces the lesson with cooing praise. Through this exchange between grandmother and granddaughter, Churchill makes absolutely explicit the insidious way in which women are both interpellated and become agents of interpellation.

However, as Churchill points out, the role of mothers as enforcers of the dominant ideology is not restricted to the private family sphere; the mothers' enforcement role carries over into the public economic arena as well. Speaking to Val, Shirley explains how her mother taught her the lesson of unremitting labour: "My mother wouldn't let me off. 'Just get on with it, Shirley'" (167). That Shirley learned her lesson well becomes obvious in the stage directions to Scene Eleven: "SHIRLEY *working in the house. She goes from one job to another, ironing, mending, preparing dinner, minding the baby.* VAL *is there, not doing anything.* SHIRLEY *never stops throughout the scene*" (167). Val's failure to work becomes a visual reminder of her refusal to fulfil her expected roles. Shirley, on the other hand, can do nothing but work. The role of her mother in instilling this extreme work ethic becomes explicit when Shirley explains to Val, " I didn't want my mother to think she'd bred a gibber" (168). Ninety-year-old Ivy demonstrates that this kind of socialization has been going on in the fens for generations. As she explains at her birthday party, her mother instilled a strong work ethic in her at a tender age: "I come home late from school on purpose so I wouldn't have to help mum with the beet. So I had to go without my tea and straight out to the field. 'You can have tea in the dark,' mum said, 'but you can't pick beet in the dark'" (177). Similarly, through Becky, Churchill demonstrates how fen mothers

continue to socialize their daughters into capitalist ideology. In Scene Twelve, Becky is put to work in the field, stone picking in the driving rain. Angela's taunting, "What you made of, Becky?" (172) fails to divert her attention from the pain of freezing hands and face. Crying in anguish, she realizes that she wants to escape this life of incessant physical labour, but she is unable to articulate her desire. She can only formulate the following weak, gender-appropriate alternative: "I want to be a hairdresser" (172). Like Shirley and Ivy before her, Becky is being interpellated by the ideology which suggests that within capitalist patriarchy a woman's life consists of little more than work and pain. Through the mothers and daughters in her play, then, Churchill represents the role of mothers in reinforcing class and gender inequities inherent within capitalist, patriarchal societies.

In her Production Note to *Fen*, Churchill credits Annie Smart, the set designer, with one of the play's most powerful visual images of women's life on the fens: the set. Smart's set blends nicely with the play's epic structure. Indeed, Brecht's postscript to "Stage Design for the Epic Theatre" (1951) could be aptly used to characterize Smart's set: "It's more important nowadays for the set to tell the spectator he's in a theatre than to tell him he's in say, Aulis. The theatre must acquire *qua* theatre the same fascinating reality as a sporting arena during a boxing match" (233). According to Brecht, then, Smart's unrealistic set should continually remind the audience that they are watching a play, which in turn works to inhibit empathy and to increase intellectual engagement with the material being presented. In discussions with Lew Waters, the director, and Annie Smart, Churchill began to get an image of what the play demanded physically, and she kept this image in mind while she wrote the play:

> certain things are an essential part of is structure: no interval, almost continuous action (the scenes following with hardly a break), all furniture and props on stage throughout and one set which doesn't change. In the original production this was achieved by Annie Smart's design of a field in a room, which was brilliant but which I can't claim as part of the play as I wrote it. (145)

As Churchill recognizes, Smart's set effectively demonstrates the double burden faced by the fen women. By setting the field within the room, Smart illustrates the fen women's enclosed lives, circumscribed by unpaid housework and underpaid agricultural labour. The set also challenges the alleged separate spheres of public and private, suggesting their continuity rather than disjuncture.

In the scene serving as a prologue to *Fen*, Churchill utilizes another Brechtian epic device: historification. As the audience enters a theatre, their first experience is produced by action and lighting, set out in the play's opening stage directions: "a BOY from the last century, barefoot and in rags, is alone in a field, in a fog, scaring crows. He shouts and waves a rattle. As the day goes on his voice gets weaker till he is hoarse and shouting in a whisper. It gets dark" (147). The scene seems strange, alienating even, to the twentieth-century, largely urban audience. And yet Churchill's decision to begin her play with this particular scene is a strategic one. Bertolt Brecht, in paragraph thirty-eight of his "Short Organum," suggests that historical conditions must not be imagined or constructed "as mysterious Powers (in the background); on the contrary, they are created and maintained by men (and will in due course be altered by them): it is the actions taking place before us that allow us to see what they are" (190). Churchill

proffers her prologue as a demonstration of the historical conditions of the fen workers' oppression. In the original London production of *Fen* at the Almeida Theatre on February 16, 1983, the role of the BOY was played by a female actor named Amelda Brown. Although the cast's lone male actor, Bernard Strother, played all the other male roles, including that of another boy, Wilson, Amelda Brown was chosen to play the nameless BOY of the prologue. The reasons for this type of cross-casting are numerous. Having a woman play the BOY from the last century allows Churchill to visually remind the audience of the common association of women and children prior to the twentieth century. As Roy Porter suggests in his social history of Britain entitled *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1990), men commonly viewed woman as "children of a larger growth" (24). John Stuart Mill, in his influential text *The Subjection of Women* (1869) explains how and why the relationship between a husband and a wife resembles that between a parent and a child: "Even with true affection, authority on the one side and subordination on the other prevent perfect confidence. Though nothing may be intentionally withheld, much is not shown. In the analogous relation of a parent and child, the corresponding phenomenon must have been the observation of every one" (141). Churchill's cross-casting of the BOY in the prologue can remind the audience of the subordinate position of women and children throughout history. In addition, by interjecting the BOY from the prologue into the final scene, Churchill suggests that the subordination of women continues up to the present. Like the BOY scarecrow from the previous century, the fen women continue to perform monotonous manual labour, while men have taken over the more advanced mechanized labour. Frank, in his first appearance on stage, drives a tractor, the only character in the

play to do so. His mechanized labour starkly contrasts with the mind-numbing, physically punishing labour of the women. When the BOY appears on stage in the final scene, he repeats the words of the hundred-year-old man in Scene Sixteen: "Jarvis, Jarvis, come and make my coffin" (178 and 190). By connecting the BOY to this old man who, as Ivy explains, responded to Mr. Tewson's question "Are you the bloody union man?" by boldly declaring, "Yes I am, and what about it?" (178), Churchill affirms the possibility of human agency through collectivity. This is not to suggest, however, that her message is an optimistic one. The old man, because he will soon find release in the death he so eagerly embraces, can afford to confront and resist Mr. Tewson. The other characters, who continue to rely on Mr. Tewson for their subsistence, do not have that luxury. For this BOY, as for Val, death comes to represent a means of escape from unendurable pain and suffering. Because the BOY is played by a woman, the audience is once again reminded of the unhappy position of women within capitalist patriarchy.

By connecting the BOY from the last century to the women in the final scene, Churchill intimates that despite the change from feudal landlords to multinational owners, nothing fundamental has changed in the lives of these agricultural labourers. Only through female solidarity, Churchill suggests, can the fen women free themselves from oppression. After Nell walks across the stage on stilts, evoking the collective resistance of the fen tigers, Shirley appears in the field and begins ironing clothes. She recalls the collective resistance of her foremothers:

> My grandmother told me her grandmother said when times were bad they'd mutilate the cattle. Go out in the night and cut a sheep's throat or

hamstring a horse or stab a cow with a fork. They didn't take the sheep, they didn't want the meat. She stabbed a lamb. She slashed a foal. 'What for?' I said. They felt quieter after that. I cried for the hurt animals. I'd forgotten that. I'd forgotten what it was like to be unhappy. I don't want to. (189)

Initially unable to understand that oppression breeds violence, often against surrogates, Shirley reserves her sympathy for the animals. Only after recognizing that the resisters achieved some measure of "quiet" from attacking the owners' property does Shirley understand her grandmothers' unhappiness. Interestingly, her speech connects her to the GHOST in Scene Nine who confronts Mr. Tewson: "I should very well like to hang you the same as I hanged your beasts" (163). This GHOST symbolizes the underlying theme of the play that nothing much has changed in the lives of the fen women:

GHOST: I been working in this field a hundred and fifty years. There ain't twenty in this parish but what hates you, bullhead.

TEWSON: Are you angry because I'm selling the farm?

GHOST: What difference will it make?

TEWSON: None, none, everything will go on the same.

GHOST: That's why I'm angry. (163)

The GHOST realizes that feudal landlords and corporate owners oppress in like manner. Shirley's concluding words, "I'd forgotten what it was like to be unhappy. I don't want to," demonstrate that she finally recognizes the historical conditions of her own oppression. Her desire to remember "what it was like to be unhappy" represents her awareness of the mutual unhappiness women experience as a result of the systemic

oppression inherent in capitalist, patriarchal societies. Her acknowledgement suggests that never again will she take pride in her individual ability to endure while her sisters withdraw in anguish.

It is interesting to note that Amelda Brown, who played the BOY in the prologue, also played the roles of Angela, Deb, and Mrs. Finch. Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, in the introduction to their text *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook* (1993), offer a plausible explanation for Churchill's use of cross-casting and doubling:

> A number of strategies are significant in women's theatre practice. Feminist/revolutionary dramatic form interrogates ideological and naturalistic dramatic practice in ways that reveal the split in the subject, especially in the context of gender construction, and in particular through metatheatrical devices that subvert stereotypes. . . . [A] means of pointing out the way in which identity is socially constructed is 'doubling', in the sense both of one performer playing several roles and one role being played by several performers, often irrespective of gender--to highlight the notion of gender as a construct. (6)

Churchill's strategic use of cross-casting to highlight gender as a social construct functions as an alienation effect. Brecht's definition of A-effects as "playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play" (91), could easily incorporate cross-casting. Certainly many people in the audience would experience a degree of difficulty in identifying with a woman cross-cast as a boy, even if the most visible markers of gender were obscured. Similarly, the

incongruity of the adult Brown in the role of the nine-year-old Deb would be equally disconcerting to many people. For Churchill, cross-casting and doubling represent excellent vehicles for alienating the audience from the characters on stage.

Churchill also uses doubling to underline connections among the characters. Having the same woman play Angela, an abusive step-mother, and Mrs. Finch, an evangelist, allows Churchill to demonstrate the intersecting roles of the family and religion in the social construction of individuals. Likewise, having the same woman play Angela and Deb, both child-abuser and child, allows Churchill to explore the cyclical nature of violence and abuse, the impact of violence on both the victim and the abuser, and the ideological assumptions underlying violence. By doubling the roles of Val and the GHOST from the last century, Churchill not only reiterates the continuity of women's oppression, but she injects a modicum of optimism. As Mr. Tewson's words reveal, the GHOST exacts a measure of revenge by continually haunting succeeding generations of landowners: "My father saw you. I didn't believe him" (163). Val too refuses to stay dead; after being killed by Frank she returns as a ghost who not only sees but finally understands the collective nature of class and gender oppression. Speaking about people from the present such as Becky, Angie, and May, and people from the past such as the GHOST whose "baby died starving," Val tells Frank: "There's all those people and I know about them" (187). By doubling Val and the GHOST, Churchill ensures that each time one character appears on stage the audience may think of the other and make their own connections, thereby engaging in what Brecht urges for all spectators: "to criticize from a social point of view" (125). Another set of doubling, that between the ninety-year-old Ivy and the fifteen-year-old Becky permits Churchill to

question the role of age in the oppression of women. As she does in all her plays, Churchill lists each character's age, thereby demonstrating her awareness of the age-based differential solicitation and conflicting investment of women in gender practices. And finally, by having the woman who plays May also play Nell, the character most closely connected to collective resistance, Churchill connects individual female agency with collectivity. May, Val's mother who "wanted to be a singer. That's why she'd never sing" (190), ends the play by singing a song which, as Churchill suggests in her production note, should be "something amazing and beautiful" (145). Churchill concludes *Fen* with this empowering image of May exercising her recuperated voice. This image parallels the image of Nell crossing the stage on stilts in that both reflect a positive image of female agency which will, hopefully, be internalized by all the women who see the play, thereby gradually increasing their social power.

Churchill's *Fen*, then, is a powerful site of resistance and redefinition of dominant discourses. Using the stage as a vehicle for social change, Churchill constructs fictive representations of gender and class which challenge the norms of femininity, relations between the sexes, and relations between classes. And as a close examination of *Fen* reveals, she uses numerous devices of Brechtian epic theatre to promote her socialist feminist drama. These epic devices include, but are not limited to, collective working method, historification, non-realistic sets, episodic structure, and the use of alienation effects such as doubling and cross-casting. Clearly Churchill's *Fen* qualifies as epic drama because so many epic theatre devices are essential to the conveying of its socialist feminist message.

CHAPTER SEVEN

There 's nothing for me there. There never was. I'm staying here.

(*A Mouthful of Birds*)

In *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), Churchill and a collaborator, David Lan, use numerous Brechtian epic techniques as they engage in what feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz identifies as feminism of difference — that is, "a feminism based on the acknowledgement of women's specificities and orientated to the attainment of autonomy for women" (339). In "A note on essentialism and difference," the conclusion to Sneja Gunew's anthology *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (1990), Grosz explores the dual commitments of feminist theory: "It is a self-conscious reaction on the one hand to the overwhelming masculinity of privileged and historically dominant knowledges, acting as a kind of counterweight to the imbalances resulting from the male monopoly of [sic] the production and reception of knowledges: on the other hand, it is also a response to the broad political aims and objectives of feminist struggles" (332). Churchill and Lan, using Euripides's *The Bacchae* as their pre-text, explore the linkages between theory and practice.[1] Like Grosz, they ask if theoretical

[1]Although many critics call *A Mouthful of Birds* a revision of Euripides's *The Bacchae*, Elin Diamond's characterization of the latter as a pre-text for the former seems to me a more accurate description. Indeed, in her Author's Note, Churchill herself rejects the description of her play as revision: "We didn't intend to do a version of *The Bacchae* but to look at the same issues of possession, violence and ecstacy" (5).

principles can be used "not as guidelines, rules, principles, or blueprints for struggle, but as tools and weapons of struggle" (342).[2] Although all feminist positions are necessarily and inescapably implicated in patriarchal power relations, for Churchill and Lan, as for Grosz, the immersion in patriarchal practice "provides not only the conditions under which feminism can become familiar with what it criticizes: it also provides the very means by which patriarchal dominance can be challenged" (343). Consequently, in *A Mouthful of Birds* Churchill and Lan use strategic essentialism as a provisional strategy even as they critique the essentialist idea that women are non-violent and peace-loving.[3]

In her Author's Note to the play, Churchill explains some of the difficulties and dangers involved in the deployment of strategic essentialism:

> Women have traditionally been seen as more peaceful that men, and that view has been politicised, particularly by women protesting against nuclear weapons. There is a danger in polarising men and women into what becomes again the traditional view that men are naturally more violent and so have no reason to change. It seems important to recognise women's capacity for violence and men's for peacefulness. (5)

In this instance, the anti-nuclear movement's strategic deployment of the essentialist

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[2]Grosz acknowledges Gayatri Spivak's article, "Criticism, feminism and the institution" (1984) as the source of this particular articulation.

[3]In her article, Grosz provides definitions of essentialism and its cognates (biologism, naturalism, and universalism) which, because they "are commonly used in patriarchal discourses to justify women's social subordination and their secondary positions relative to men in patriarchal society," can also be extremely useful to feminists who wish "to affirm, consolidate, and explain the political goals and ambitions of feminist struggles" (333).

idea that women are more peaceful than men miscarries and results in the normalizing of male violence. In *A Mouthful of Birds*, however, Churchill and Lan simultaneously deploy and critique strategic essentialism; they replicate essentialist discourses, for example, the patriarchal discourses surrounding the issues of infanticide and spiritual possession, not only to critique the violence / peacefulness binary, but to focus attention on the problematic nature of the essentialist discourse itself. Like Grosz, Churchill and Lan "understand the ways in which essentialism and its cognates can function as theoretical weapons — [understand] feminism's ability to use patriarchy and phallocratism against themselves, its ability to take up positions ostensibly opposed to feminism and to use them for feminist goals" (343). Brechtian epic theatre, because it, like feminism of difference, advocates "a major transformation of the social and symbolic order" (Grosz 340), represents an extremely useful paradigm through which Churchill and Lan challenge patriarchal dominance.

For the production of *A Mouthful of Birds*, Churchill returned once again to the Joint Stock theatre collective, with whom she had previously produced three successful plays: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1979), and *Fen* (1983). Although *A Mouthful of Birds* was Churchill's first co-authored stage play, the evidence suggests that Churchill herself had long been open to such a collaborative effort. As mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* was originally scheduled to have two writers: Churchill and Colin Bennett. Additionally, *Floorshow* (1978), the Monstrous Regiment cabaret to which Churchill contributed, was written in collaboration with several writers, including Michlene Wandor, Byrony

Lavery, and David Bradford.[4] However, as Churchill explains in an interview with Linda Fitzsimmons published in *File on Churchill* (1989), although she found the co-authorship experience pleasant, she "wouldn't want to do it too often. I think it's like the things when you work with a company, you then want to draw back and do something of your own and be clear what's yours and not just response to other people" (78). Not surprisingly, then, *A Mouthful of Birds* has remained until 1997 Churchill's only co-authored play.[5]

In an interview with Geraldine Cousin, published under the title "The Common Imagination and the Individual Voice" (1988), Churchill acknowledges that she not only found the collaboration with David Lan pleasant and interesting, but that "having two writers was a great advantage, given the pressure of time, because it meant that we didn't each have to write an entire play. So it was possible to complete it in a very short period of time" (6). As with other Joint Stock productions, the company of *A Mouthful of Birds* engaged in a workshop, in this instance, one lasting about twelve weeks. The workshop included a research period, which Churchill describes in her introductory note, entitled "The Workshop and the Play":

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[4]In *Carry on Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), Michelene Wandor describes *Floorshow* as a cabaret about women and work that "included songs, monologues, sketches, comic patter about women and work in Africa, the idea of 'pin money', working as a bus conductor, reversed domestic roles, and the performers wore variegated, brightly coloured costumes — reminiscent of the variety of clown costumes, and with a bouncy uniformity which didn't make obvious sexual distinctions between male and female performers" (71).

[5]A new operatic work entitled *Hotel*, co-written by Churchill and Orlando Gough, premiered in the spring of 1997 at London's Place Theatre. Once again working with choreographer Ian Spink, Churchill uses many of the epic techniques used in *A Mouthful of Birds*.

> We went to mediums who gave us messages from our dead relatives; we listened to experiences of a woman given instructions by spirits, women who have been violent, a transsexual who is now a woman, and many others. Some of us were hypnotised and taken back to previous lives, some had a night out with two hundred women watching drag acts and male strippers, most of us spent a couple days living and sleeping in the open. Days and nights without our usual routines seemed long and full of possibilities. . . ." (5)

After approximately four weeks of research, Churchill and Lan spent an additional week "thinking about what the eventual play might be . . . discuss[ing] ideas for it and the shape of it — exchanging ideas, batting things off each other" (Cousin 8). She and Lan soon became anxious to begin the actual writing, however, and in response to Cousin's question "*Did you each work on separate sections of the play?*" (6), Churchill provides specific details about their collaborative writing method:

> the structure we found, which seemed to suit the way we wanted to work, was of it being seven stories. This meant that we could each go off and write a scene apiece. We had to bear in mind who would be acting the scenes because some members of the company were originally dancers, and some were originally actors. . . . I think there were about three weeks in which we wrote intensively. We'd bring the scenes into rehearsals, and the actors would start working on them without having seen the rest of the play. So, it was quite difficult for them, and quite strange for us because it meant parts of the play were being worked on before we'd

ever had a chance to sit down and look at it as a whole. As soon as we finished a scene we'd hand it over. (8)

Clearly, then, *A Mouthful of Birds* resulted from a truly collaborative effort involving not just Churchill and Lan, but the seven cast members as well. Such a collective engagement strongly resembles the kind of collaborative ensemble Brecht espouses in "Masterful Treatment of a Model" (1948): "the act of creation has become a collective creative process, a continuum of a dialectical sort in which the original invention, taken on its own, has lost much of its importance. The initial invention of a model truly need not count for all that much, for the actor who uses it immediately makes his own personal contribution" (211). Supplementing rather than subverting the writers' function, the cast of *A Mouthful of Birds*, like the actors in Brecht's ensemble, had a direct and lasting influence on the play's final configuration.

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, the collaborative endeavour extends to the entire company, as can be seen by the active and vital contributions of the director, Les Waters; the choreographer, Ian Spink; and the stage designer, Annie Smart. In her interview with Cousin, Churchill explains how the decision to base the play on Euripides's *The Bacchae*, for example, resulted from a collaboration of ideas among Lan, Waters, and herself:

> I think is was David [Lan] who first thought of it, and his interest was from the point of view of possession. He's an anthropologist as well as a playwright, and he'd spent some time in Zimbabwe finding out about spirit mediums and their relationship with the guerillas during the war. He'd recently had a book published based on his research there. Les, by

> coincidence, was reading *The Bacchae* at that point, and one of the things that led him towards it was that I'd been saying that I was interested in doing something about women and violence, and women being violent, rather than having violence done to them. (8)

Churchill, Lan, and Waters each brought a somewhat different perspective to *The Bacchae* which, when combined with that of the others, resulted in the generation of an extremely dynamic and exciting play. Their collective engagement culminates in a play which, although in interspersed scenes grounded in the ancient past, is primarily set in, and speaks directly to, the present in a most immediate way. In his final message for the Berliner Ensemble's notice board at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, dated August 5, 1956, just prior to the Ensemble's first London season, Brecht insists that "the [British] audience has to see that here are a number of artists working together as a collective (ensemble) in order to convey stories, ideas, virtuoso feats to the spectator by a common effort" (283). Brecht's advice to his Berliner Ensemble finds new expression in the company of *A Mouthful of Birds*, whose collective working method replicates the epic method championed by Brecht just days before his death.

Perhaps nowhere is the consequence of collaboration more evident than in the stage designer's vital contribution to the play's ultimate form. In paragraph seventy-two of "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949), Brecht discusses the stage designer's ability to significantly alienate the play:

> Just as the composer wins back his freedom by no longer having to create atmosphere so that the audience may be helped to lose itself unreservedly in the events on the stage, so also the stage designer gets considerable

> freedom as soon as he no longer has to give the illusion of a room or a locality when he is building his sets. It is enough for him to give hints, though these must make statements of greater historical or social interest than does the real setting. (203)

Annie Smart, with whom Churchill had previously worked on *Fen* (1983), designed a set that gives only the merest hint of any tangible locality. In Linda Fitzsimmon's *File on Churchill*, Nicholas de Jongh speaks of "Annie Smart's beautiful sinister stage design," which he describes as follows: "It consists of two tiers of a gutted, bare-walled and dilapidated house, with a surviving flight of stairs, a Euripidean tree growing up the two gutted storeys, and a few household objects left intact" (74). The incongruous juxtaposition of the tree and the house ensures that the audience will never lose themselves unreservedly and uncritically in the events unfolding before their eyes. Carole Woodis's review of the Royal Court production (Nov. 26, 1986) demonstrates the efficacy of Smart's set as an alienation effect: "It's one of those experiences that mystifies, perplexes, aggravates and yanks you clean out of the cosy naturalistic narrative rut that passes for so much contemporary drama. Annie Smart's crumbling two-storey forms the backdrop to a journey into the darker recesses of possession, sexuality (of the bi-sexual, cross-dressing kind) and ecstatic pleasure . . . " (Fitzsimmons 75). Clearly then, Smart's set complements the script and provides the audience with an experience that disrupts their expectations, thereby fostering the epic ideal of didactic entertainment.

Another vital collaboration occurred between the choreographer, Ian Spink, and the rest of the company, as evidenced by Churchill's comment to Cousin: "everyone

was doing movement work with Ian [Spink]" (8). Although Churchill had worked briefly with movement in *Midday Sun* (1984),[6] as she tells Cousin, *A Mouthful of Birds* "was the first time [she'd] really spent enough time working with movement to feel that [she'd] begun to understand it a bit" (9). In paragraph seventy-three of "A Short Organum for the Theatre," Brecht discusses the importance of choreography to epic theatre:

> For choreography too there are once again tasks of a realistic kind. It is a relatively recent error to suppose that it has nothing to do with the representation of 'people as they really are'. If art reflects life, it does so with special mirrors. Art does not become unrealistic by changing the proportions but by changing them in such a way that if the audience took its representations as a practical guide to insights and impulses, it would go astray in real life. It is of course essential that stylization should not remove the natural element but should heighten it. Anyhow, a theatre where everything depends on the gest cannot do without choreography. Elegant movement and graceful grouping, for a start, can alienate, and inventive miming greatly helps the story. (203-04)

Such elegant movement and graceful groupings characterize the so-called "Fruit ballet," the scene in Act One occurring directly between the possession of Doreen by Agave and of Derek by Pentheus. The entire cast, both women and men, participate in the ballet

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[6]*Midday Sun* is a performance art piece written by Churchill; directed by John Ashford, Pete Brooks, and Geraldine Pilgrim; and choreographed by Sally Owen. Its first London production occurred on May 8, 1984. In *File on Churchill*, Susan Todd, drama critic for the *New Statesman*, compliments the play's "intricate patterns of sound, light and movement which evoke fleeting moods and feelings" (69).

which, as the stage directions assert, "consists of a series of movements mainly derived from eating fruit. It emphasises the serious pleasure of eating and the terrors of being torn up" (28). Consisting entirely of pantomime, the Fruit Ballet works as an alienation effect that disrupts the narrative unity. The audience's emotional engagement with Agave's possession of Doreen is interrupted, and they are not allowed time to adjust to the new situation when the Fruit Ballet is immediately followed by the scene in which Derek is possessed by Pentheus.

The placement of the Fruit Ballet accentuates both Agave's violence and Pentheus's terror. In her interview with Cousin, Churchill makes explicit the connection between the Fruit Ballet and *The Bacchae*:

> In *The Bacchae*, women tear up live animals, and he [Spink] was exploring fruit as a way of destroying and eating, and tearing something up, which would detach it from pain and guilt . . . and would enable the person doing it to concentrate more sensuously on the pleasures of it. That led eventually to . . . 'The Fruit Ballet', though it's neither a ballet nor does it have any fruit in it, but which is all to do with people licking their fingers, the sensuous pleasures of juice, and the terrors of being eaten. (9)

This emphasis on the seductive pleasure associated with violence becomes a central theme in *A Mouthful of Birds*, a theme succinctly summed up by Lena at the beginning of Part Three: "I remember I enjoyed doing it. It's nice to make someone alive and it's nice to make someone dead. Either way. That power is what I like best in the world. The struggle is every day not to use it" (70). Comparing childbirth (to make someone

alive) and murder (to make someone dead), Lena comes to recognize firsthand the enticing power associated with violence. She, who at the beginning of the play could barely look at a dead rabbit, kills her baby and, possessed by a Bacchant, actively participates in the murder of Pentheus.

In the play, the issue of the baby's death remains somewhat ambiguous. Lena is never seen actually drowning the baby; she only "washes a shawl in a baby bath" (27). Additionally, as my added emphasis demonstrates, Lena's final comments to Roy suggest that Lena herself is uncertain about the baby's death: "I *think* if you go to the bathroom. I *think* Sally's drowned" (28). This ambiguity results from Churchill's awareness of the problematic nature of patriarchal discourse surrounding the issue of infanticide.[7] Feminist criminologists Allison Morris and Ania Wilcznski, in "Rocking the Cradle: Mothers who Kill Their Children" (1994), identify two of the serious problems for women:

> First, the dominant or 'official' discourse on mothers who kill their children is rooted in the belief that *all* women are potentially mad at certain times in their lives — for example, during, before and after menstruation, childbirth, lactation and the menopause. . . . [Such discourses] still provide a basis for the 'ordinary states' of womanhood to be subject to medical and psychiatric gaze, and for the stereotypical beliefs which surround such states to be perpetuated and used against

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[7]Morris and Wilczynski, in "Rocking the Cradle: Mothers who Kill Their Children," use the definition of infanticide provided in Great Britain's Infanticide Act of 1938. They define it as "the killing of a child under the age of twelve months by the child's mother when the balance of her mind was disturbed because she had not fully recovered from the effect of childbirth or lactation" (204).

> women. Women, for example, should not be placed in positions of responsibility, allowed to fly aeroplanes, or whatever, just in case. . . . Second, dominant or 'official' discourse on mothers who kill their children is also rooted in the belief that *all* women are 'natural' mothers. (215-16)

However, in her interview with Cousin, Churchill unconditionally asserts, "In the middle section she [Lena] kills her child . . . " (10). Churchill is so unequivocal because the child's death is structurally necessary as a precursor to Lena's possession by the Bacchant, which culminates in another violent murder, that of Pentheus. Churchill employs the issue of infanticide strategically because she, like Morris and Wilczynski, wonders "how sympathetic . . . the public . . . would be to a woman whose case was not packaged in wrappings which indicated either that she was 'disturbed' at the time of the offence or that she was essentially a 'good' mother who had made a tragic mistake" (216-17). Once Lena opens herself to violence, the play suggests, she becomes progressively more susceptible to it. By play's end, her life has become a daily struggle not to succumb again to the powerful allure of violence. Her conscious rejection of that power becomes a kind of power itself. Having observed the sensuous Fruit Ballet, the audience can better understand Lena's attraction to violence and consequently recognize the even greater power exhibited in her repudiation of it. Lena, having experienced violence and consequently choosing never to use it again, symbolizes women's capacity for both violence and peacefulness. The beautifully choreographed Fruit Ballet, which demonstrates the pleasure and exhilaration experienced by both women and men when they engage in violence, and Lena's recognition of the horror inherent in such violence,

work together in *A Mouthful of Birds* to interrogate and disrupt the patriarchal binary opposition of violent men and peaceful women. Both sexes have the potential for peacefulness, the play argues, and consequently both bear responsibility for putting an end to violence.

Like the choreography, the episodic structure serves to advance the play's politics, a vital component of all epic theatre. In her interview with Cousin, Churchill describes the play's structure and explains its purpose:

> The structure of the play is that there are seven very short scenes which show what the characters were doing before the extraordinary things happen to them. The middle section consists of the seven main scenes and movement pieces, some of them very specifically related to *The Bacchae* story . . . At the end there are seven monologues which show what eventually happens to the characters, how they've changed yet further. (10)

Although the play consists of two acts, Churchill's three-part structure is readily apparent. Each of the seven scenes in Part One begins with one of the main characters directly addressing the audience with a signature line, a line the actor subsequently repeats in the scene itself, though this time not directly to the audience members.[8] When the audience hears the signature line that was spoken directly to them repeated in the scene, they are expected to attach special significance to it. When the main

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[8]In the interest of clarity, I have chosen to call these repeated lines *signature lines* because the phrase seems to me to describe accurately their function of identifying the main characters' defining concern. The use of this phrase is, however, strictly my own.

character repeats the signature line in Part Two, at the beginning of the scene in which she or he experiences some form of spiritual possession, the audience members usually make connections between the two scenes. By Part Three, the signature line, which the audience has heard three times, resonates throughout the monologue and serves to enhance the irony of the main characters' present situation. When Doreen, for example, begins her monologue by declaring "I can find no rest" (71), the audience should remember her thrice-declared desire, "All I wanted was peace and quiet" (22, 58), and appreciates the irony of her current situation. The three-part formulaic structure, then, serves to advance the play's didactic agenda because it helps the audience recognize and appreciate the extent of the main characters' profound and permanent change, thereby enabling them to recognize the potential for change in their own lives.

An interesting precursor of the play's episodic three-part structure appears at the end of Part One in a scene entitled "Excuses" in which the seven main characters offer three excuses for their inability to engage in a specific form of activity. Like the play itself, the scene consists of three parts. In each successive part, the excuses made by the seven main characters become progressively more outrageous and unbelievable. Paul's excuses, for example, range from "I'm sorry I can't make the conference. I've sprained my ankle" through "I can't fly to Rome. My cousin has died" to "I can't meet the deadline. The chairman's been struck by lightening" (23). Similarly, Yvonne's excuses move from "I'm afraid I have to cancel your appointment. I've hurt my hand" through "I can't come to the funeral, the trains have been cancelled" to "I can't go to the disco, the army's closed off the street" (23). The litany of excuses becomes a kind of refrain of lassitude. The scene ends with Lena's final image of stagnation: "So I just stayed in

all day" (23). Because Lena is the only character to say a fourth line, and because she both begins and ends the third segment of the scene, she appears to be speaking for the entire company. All of the main characters seem unwilling or unable to act, seem subject to inertia. Consequently, their disinclination for action results in their being open to some form of possession, literally to be moved by the spirit.

The seven main characters who undergo some form of emotional possession are, for the most part, isolated and marginalized individuals. David Lan, in his notes to the play, entitled "The Politics of Ecstasy," explains that spiritual possession "seems to persist only on the margins, the province of the charlatan, the insane or the 'B' movie" (6). In her interview with Cousin, Churchill too suggests that spiritual possession occurs primarily among subordinated groups of people: "possession stories would deal with violent women and men who are weakened or sexually more uncertain, and we suddenly realized that this fitted with precisely the kind of people who tend to become possessed in societies where possession is a very common thing" (10). Because the main characters, for the most part, fit into one or more of these and other subordinate categories, it appears on the surface as though Churchill and Lan are merely replicating essentialist gender stereotypes. In *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (1990), Alex Owen explains that spiritual possession or mediumship has traditionally been associated with the nineteenth-century patriarchal construction of the feminine:

> Nineteenth-century spiritualist women acquired power and perpetuated a natural healing tradition via an essentialist account of femininity. . . . The qualities of receptivity and passivity can be advanced as potential

> spiritual allies but they can also bind women into a paradigm of weakness, instability, inferiority, and social powerlessness. . . . Nineteenth-century female spiritualist mediumship might have been subversive, even empowering, but it is also ensnaring. (241-42)

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, the possession accounts become an act of subversion and empowerment, or as Lan suggests in his Author's Note, "an act of resistance" (6).

The spiritual possession experienced by the main characters demonstrates how Churchill and Lan use feminism of difference as a theoretical weapon. In her article, Grosz identifies one of the implications of feminism of difference:

> Difference resists the homogenization of separate political struggles, in so far as it implies not only women's difference from men, and from each other, but also women's differences from other oppressed groups. It is not at all clear that, for example, struggles against racism will necessarily be politically allied with women's struggles, or conversely, that feminism will overcome forms of racist domination. This . . . does not preclude the existence of common interests shared by various oppressed groups, and thus the possibility of alliances over specific issues; it simply means that these alliances have no *a priori* necessity. (340)

Clearly a race-blind feminism cannot overcome racial domination. Marcia, a Trinidadian psychic, works as a switchboard operator by day and as a spiritual medium in her spare time. In Part One, in a scene entitled "Telephone," she addresses the audience with the signature line "In fact I am desperate" (19). In the course of a

personal conversation with a friend, which is continually interrupted by calls to the switchboard and by the entrance of Colin, Marcia repeats her signature line: "You there? . . . I'd have to be desperate to look at him. In fact I am desperate" (20). In Part Two, in the scene entitled "Baron Sunday," Marcia begins the scene by again addressing her signature line directly to the audience.[9] As the scene progresses, Marcia's Trinidadian spirit, Baron Sunday, is usurped by the spirit of a white upperclass woman, Sybil, who possesses Marcia and steals her West Indian accent and ultimately her very existence.[10] As she becomes overwhelmed by Sybil, symbolic of the powerful white culture, Marcia can only writhe and scream in pain. By scene's end, Sybil has successfully supplanted Marcia as the medium, in the process rejecting Marcia's Trinidadian god, Baron Sunday, and replacing him with spirits of her own. In Part Three, in the scene entitled "Sea," Marcia sits alone in a small boat off-shore from Trinidad because "longing cannot carry over water so a short way from land is far enough" (71). Having lost contact with her spiritual gods, Marcia can never fully return home: "If I go ashore they'll ask my name. I could tell them — oh, what I could tell them. Horror. What for? At sea, at night the air is silent. I hear nothing. I am full of joy. Of course, the rocks speak. That's quite different" (71). Only at night, alone in her boat, can she escape the

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[9]Baron Sunday is probably related to Baron Samedi, literally translated Baron Saturday, a West Indian figure associated with the Day of The Dead (Nov. 2), also known as All Souls Day. Baron Samedi, also known as Gede, is memorialized in crosses at intersections and is typically represented in half black and half white make-up.

[10]Interestingly, in Greek and Roman mythology, a sibyl was a woman who could foretell the future but who derived her prophecy from the male gods, most often Apollo. Sibyls lived in caves or near streams and usually gave their prophecies while in a frenzied trance. The most famous sibyl is the Cumaean Sibyl who, according to Virgil's *Aeneid*, prophesied Aeneas's future and guided him to the Underworld.

voices of her unwanted possessors, both Sybil, who usurped Baron Sunday, and the Bacchant, who compelled Marcia to participate in the murder of Pentheus. Churchill and Lan present this image of Marcia's isolation and alienation in an attempt to demonstrate symbolically that Marcia's harrowing possession experience leads her to the knowledge that she has been profoundly and permanently changed, an awareness shared by the audience as Marcia's signature line, "In fact I am desperate," echoes throughout her final monologue.

Like Marcia, Derek undergoes spiritual possession that dramatically alters his mode of perception, but while Marcia's possession becomes a form of race critique, Derek's two possessions interrogate issues of gender. In a short scene in Part One entitled "Weightlifting," Derek, through his signature line, "He thought he wasn't a man without a job" (20), appears to reject the gender limitations imposed by and on his father's generation. Into his seventeenth month of unemployment, Derek, as a means of survival, replaces employment with extensive physical activity. Unlike his father, who "died within six weeks" (20) of losing his job, Derek engages in a range of activities that he lists as "swimming, karate, jogging, garden, weights" (20). He attempts to maintain his sense of masculine selfhood despite his inability to fulfill that most fundamental of male-defining roles: paid worker. And yet, as Churchill explains to Cousin, Derek is "doing weight-lifting to keep his image of himself as a man" (12), an image dramatically challenged when Derek is possessed first by Pentheus, who in Euripides's *The Bacchae* disguises himself as a woman in order to spy on the Bacchants, and then by Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite who was

forced to reject her female side and to live as a man.[11]

Churchill and Lan use the Derek/Pentheus/Herculine triad to illustrate the multiplicity inherent in gendered subjectivity. The scene entitled "Herculine Barbin" begins with Derek repeating his signature line directly to the audience. Immediately following Derek's recitation, Herculine, played by a woman dressed as a nineteenth-century Frenchman, tells her story of physical and emotional pain resulting from societal rejection of her sexual ambiguity: "The pains, the doctor, I screamed, he could hardly speak, but still he didn't stop us . . . Sara's body, my girl's body, all lost, couldn't you have stayed?" (51-52). Herculine's enforced repudiation of her female self is symbolically represented when, during her monologue, she removes objects from her suitcase, including a lace shawl and petticoat, each of which she passes to Derek. As the stage directions demonstrate, Derek's possession by Herculine follows immediately: "DEREK holds all the objects and has dressed himself in the shawl and petticoat. He sits in the chair and becomes HERCULINE" (52). Derek then changes places with

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[11]Elin Diamond, in "(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre," provides an informative footnote detailing the possible sources for Churchill and Lan's Herculine Barbin: "Though the Methuen text of *A Mouthful of Birds* never mentions this source, Churchill and Lan probably made use of the memoirs and dossier on Herculine Barbin, first published in 1978 as *Herculine Barbin, dite Alexina B.* by Gallimard, then in 1980 as *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, introduced by Michel Foucault, translated by Richard McDougall, Pantheon Books, New York. For Foucault, the case of Herculine / Abel Barbin illustrates juridical attempts to regulate sexual identity in the 1860s and 1870s after centuries of relative tolerance for hermaphroditism. The nineteenth-century concept of "true sex" buttresses a medical-ethical discourse across diverse cultural practices, from biological science to religious confession to psychiatry; thus Herculine's doctors and judges force her to leave the "happy limbo of . . . non-identity" and become "himself" (Introduction, xiii). Churchill and Lan pare down Herculine's effusive prose to narrative fragments and unanswered questions, suggesting the unbridgeable gap between non-identity and a medically acceptable, legally "true" sex/self" (202).

Herculine and repeats her story word for word. However, when Derek repeats Herculine's plaintive query: "couldn't you have stayed?" (54), Herculine "turns back and kisses him on the neck" (54). Elin Diamond, in her article entitled "(In)visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre" (1988), describes this final embrace as follows: "The image (reproduced by a photograph in the text) startlingly resembles a two-necked hermaphroditic body, an "impossible object" — like an Escher drawing, a Medusa's head, or an unheard song" (203). This two-headed image becomes a symbol for the multiple, contradictory gendered subjectivity experienced by both women and men. Just as Churchill and Lan reject the reason/emotion binary, so too they reject the opposition of female to male subjectivities. And yet, even after having merged with Herculine, Derek, when possessed by Pentheus, still desires to kill that which is female: "Send the soldiers to fetch the women. I want to kill them" (54). A woman in dress only, Derek/Pentheus dies after being torn to pieces by Agave and the Bacchants. In Part Three, however, in a scene that resonates with his signature line, "He thought he wasn't a man without a job" (20, 51), Derek is reborn. Although now a woman, Derek still inhabits a man's body; his "breasts aren't big" and his "shoulders are still strong" (71). However, he now not only accepts, but actually "likes" his female self: "My skin used to wrap me up, now it lets the world come in" (71). Through Derek's experience, Churchill and Lan demonstrate another implication of feminism of difference:

> Struggles around the attainment of women's autonomy imply that men's struggles against patriarchy, while possibly allied with women's in some circumstances, cannot be identified with them. In acknowledging their sexual specificity, men's challenge to patriarchy is necessarily different

from women's, which entails producing an identity and sexual specificity for themselves. (Grosz 340)

Derek's spiritual possessions, then, culminate in his new understanding of a non-patriarchal identity and sexual specificity that embrace difference and multiplicity.

Paul, too, undergoes a form of possession, but while Marcia and Derek experience spiritual possession, Paul is possessed by an inexplicable and overwhelming passion: love for a pig. Paul, whose signature line is "That way we make more profit" (21), traffics in beef, lamb, and pork on the international markets. In Part One, while playing chess with his mother-in-law, Paul explains how he and his company make more profits by moving the commodities "from Birmingham first to Berlin then to Boulogne" (22). In Part Two, in a scene entitled "Pig," Paul, who "never noticed pigs before" (42), comes to notice one particular pig: "It's not any pig. . . . It's that pig. I like that pig" (44). As he becomes progressively more infatuated with the pig, Paul abandons his business and devotes his time to dancing "tenderly" and "dangerously" (46) with the pig. Although Paul makes a desperate attempt to prevent the pig's slaughter, he arrives too late and discovers that the pig is already "off to the abattoir" (46). Cradled in Paul's arms, the dead pig magically revives and as the scene concludes "PAUL and the PIG dance, tenderly, dangerously, joyfully" (46).

This concluding dance is followed immediately with the movement piece entitled "Extreme happiness," in which the entire company, as their main characters, engage in a "dance that consists of memories of moments of extreme happiness" (49). For Paul, however, this moment of extreme happiness cannot last. In Part Three, in a scene entitled "Drinking," Paul is no longer in love with the pig. Having "left [his] wife

and [his] job" (71), Paul spends his days drinking alone in the streets. His signature line, "That way we make more profit" (21, 41), reverberates throughout this final scene and becomes an ironic commentary on Paul's present situation. Paul reverts to the kind of inertia he experienced in the scene entitled "Excuses": "Days are quite long when you sit in the street but it's important not to do anything" (71). Paul's final assertion, "It may not be love next time. You can't tell what it's going to be . . . So I stay ready" (71), reveals his awareness that he can be seized by intense emotion and that next time the emotion could be more negative and/or violent than love. Although he vows to be on guard against them, Paul remains susceptible to other experiences of possession by forces beyond his control and understanding. He becomes an exemplar of those men who lack awareness of their own emotional responses and consequently become more influenced by them.

Unlike Paul, who ends much as he began, Yvonne becomes permanently and profoundly altered after she is possessed first by alcohol and then by one of the Bacchants. In Part One, Yvonne, an acupuncturist, attends an extremely tense patient and in the course of treatment repeats her signature line to him: "What is it makes you so angry?" (21). When the patient falls asleep, Yvonne becomes annoyed and demands, "Mr Wood? How can I help you if you fall asleep? Mr. Wood!" (21). Yvonne's indignation apparently results from her being prevented from helping her patient, and her tone reveals that it is she, not her patient, who is so angry. In fact, throughout Part Two, Yvonne's anger simmers just below the surface until it finally erupts and finds expression in the uncontrolled murder of Pentheus.

Yvonne's first possession experience in Part Two occurs in a scene entitled

"Gold Shoes" in which she struggles against, but ultimately succumbs to, an overwhelming desire for alcohol. As the stage directions demonstrate, the scene begins when, before Yvonne addresses her signature line to the audience, "DIONYSOS passes through Yvonne's room and goes out" (54). Like Dionysos, who flits in and out, Yvonne vacillates in her resolve to stay home and to stay sober. The scene's final image reinforces Yvonne's irresolution. Wearing the gold shoes, symbolic of alcoholic festivity, Yvonne diligently returns to her task of painting the window frame. However, having previously succumbed to alcoholic possession, Yvonne becomes susceptible to another form of possession, this time by one of the Bacchants. Yvonne's failure to suppress her anger becomes explicit at the end of Part Two when she, possessed by a Bacchant, participates in the rending murder of Pentheus. When Yvonne and the other women return to themselves and begin to go back home, Agave asks them, "Where are you going?" (70). Lena responds, "Home"; Marcia says, "I'm late for work"; and Yvonne declares, "I have to look after someone" (70). Yvonne instinctively attempts to erase her anger by channeling it into the stereotypically feminine role of looking after someone else, but she ultimately realizes the futility of such an endeavour. Her participation in the murder of Pentheus culminates in a dramatic shift in her awareness and ultimate acknowledgment of her own anger and she follows Agave's example and stays at the murder site.

Yvonne's dramatic alteration finds expression in Part Three, in the scene entitled "Meat," in which she reveals her new profession as a butcher. As her signature line, "What is it makes you so angry" (21, 54), echoes throughout the scene, Yvonne explicates her changed perspective: "When I was young I'd dream. I'd wake and forget.

Now I sleep, wake, I'm here" (70). Yvonne no longer feels the need to suppress her emotions. Having finally, to put the matter colloquially, gotten in touch with her anger, she realizes that she must never forget its murderous manifestation. Yvonne comes to recognize her own emotional responses and consequently manages to channel them productively. Through her final monologue, Yvonne demonstrates a new-found awareness that although women, like men, are susceptible to anger, they must find non-hurtful ways in which to express it: "Many people are surprised to see a woman behind this counter. . . . I have a feel for the strengths of a body. All the men know it. They ask me: slit here or slit there? I close my eyes. Feel. Slit there. . . . Chop chop!" (70). The three-part epic structure helps the audience understand that Yvonne's anger has finally found an outlet. Freed from the largely gender-determined care-giver function, Yvonne uses her new profession to legitimate female anger, to inscribe it as an act of resistance that challenges the dominant conventions governing female behaviour.

The episodic, three-part structure also helps clarify how Dan, like the other main characters, undergoes a form of spiritual possession that drastically alters his perceptions. In Part One, in the scene entitled "Angels," three female parishioners approach their Vicar, Dan, and ask him two questions: "Do you believe in angels?" and "But when it comes to the ordination of women, have we your support or not?" (22). Although Dan never answers it, the first question foreshadows Dan's androgynous possession scene in Part Two because, as Bernard Ward explains in *Angels* (1994), "Most angels are either genderless or male" (20). [12] Also, this reference to angels

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[12]However, Malcolm Godwin, in *Angels: An Endangered Species* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), argues that the Archangel Gabriel is almost certainly female: "But Gabri-el is unique amongst an otherwise male or androgynous host, for it

strengthens the connection between Dan and Dionysos because, as Ward asserts, and as Churchill and Lan were doubtless aware, "In the fifth century A.D., a Middle Eastern scholar named Dionysius studied references to angels in the Scripture and other non-biblical sources [and] concluded that there were nine classes or choirs of angels divided into three different 'spheres'" (16).[13] The early reference to angels sets the stage for Dan's extraordinary possession experience in Part Two, while the second question helps explain *why* Dan is subject to such an experience. In asserting his position with regard to the ordination of women, Dan repeats his signature line: "*I don't believe God is necessarily male* in the conventional . . . But I do think there's a time and a place . . . I entirely agree with the bishop when he —" (22). That single word *but* suggests that on some level Dan does, in fact, believe that God is male in some fundamental though not necessarily conventional sense. His spasmodic response, however, suggests that Dan himself is somewhat ambivalent about his position, and it is this ambivalence which opens him to the emotional possession he experiences in Part Two.

Dan's possession experience, the scene entitled "Dancing," begins with Dan appearing wearing a women's slip and his clerical collar, signaling his current androgynous state. After Dan repeats his signature line, he dances to three people in turn, each of whom "dies of pleasure" because "the dance is precisely the dance that

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is almost certain that this great Archangel is the only female in the higher echelons. She is also the only angel mentioned in the Old Testament by name, except for Micha-el, and is said to sit on the left side of God, which is further evidence of her being female" (43).

[13]I confidently assert the playwrights' awareness because even the most cursory encyclopedic exploration would reveal Dionysius' influence in establishing the hierarchy of angels.

[each] longs for" (37). As the scene progresses, two prison officers, one male and one female, discuss a multiple killer, Dan, who confounds categorization as either a woman or a man: "It was him when we admitted her" (37). It soon becomes apparent, however, that Dan's murders are not acts of violence but are rather what he calls "good deaths. Clean, effortless, without tension or pain" (39). Dan kills peacefully in order to give back to the earth that which it "needs to grow strong" (39), because in his opinion peaceful corpses provide the best fertilizer. With his head in the lap of a woman, his third victim, Dan demonstrates his desire to "embrace the earth willingly" (39), to merge with it: "I want to be milked from the udder of a cow. I'd like a pine tree to grow inside me" (41).[14] Dan's possession experience, his alteration into an androgynous being, culminates in this final image of complete union between female (the earth) and male (Dan). That Dan is permanently altered by his experience become obvious in Part Three, in his monologue scene entitled "Desert." Dan, no longer a vicar, spends his days tending an oasis garden. Comparing his previous life to being asleep, Dan ends his monologue by exclaiming, "I can't tell you what a day it was when I woke up and saw the first green" (70). His signature line, "I don't believe God is necessarily male" (22, 37), resonates throughout his monologue, and Dan awakens to a new awareness of

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[14]The imagery of a perfect merger between man and the earth is common in twentieth-century fiction. In Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (London: Picador, 1980), for example, the image of Greanvine bears a striking resemblance to Dan's image of a tree growing through his body: "theres grean vines and leaves growing out of ther mouf. Them vines getting bigger and curling roun the head. Vines growing out of ther mouf. Vines and leaves growing out of the nose hoals and the eyes then breaking the stoan mans face a part. Back in to earf agen" (159). This image of unity between men and the earth reflects a desire to replicate, if not to usurp, the female life-giving function. Riddley concludes his description of Greanvine by declaring: "Its jus only stoan men walking unner the groun like that. Women have some thing else" (159). The something else to which Riddley refers is undoubtedly childbirth.

oneness with the earth, to an awareness that is itself founded upon a union of female and male.

Like other main characters, Doreen undergoes a form of spiritual possession that alters her perceptions about gender. In Part One, in the scene entitled "Home," Doreen addresses the audience directly, telling them: "All I wanted was peace and quiet" (22). Doreen resorts to physical violence because her need to escape patriarchal oppression is so intense. Ed's indignant censure, "And to scratch me and tear me. . . . Look, I'm still bleeding" (22), foreshadows Doreen's violent killing of Pentheus, the hated symbol of patriarchal authority. In a desperate attempt to explain why she has once again run away from home, Doreen repeats her signature line to Ed, her husband who has "warned [her] what would happen if [she] ran off again" (22). Doreen's need for peace and quiet must be great indeed because, as her words to Susy in the scene in Part Two entitled "Hot Summer" demonstrate, Doreen fully understands the severe consequences to which Ed alludes:

> There's two ways you end up. One's with six warders on top of you. They drag you so your head bangs on each step. You keep fighting till they stick a needle in and you're glad to be gone out of it. The other way you end up is by yourself. I've done it weeks on end. All you've got left is your own piss and shit. A lot of women cut themselves. I've a friend who swallowed glass. I don't want to. (66)

Although Doreen, "sleeping by the canal, on that grass" (22), experiences isolation in

her present attempt at escaping patriarchal oppression, she clearly has experienced restraint and abuse while incarcerated at some point in the past. Demonstrating how the oppressive weight of patriarchy often induces women to resort to extraordinary measures in an effort to achieve even a modicum of agency, Doreen goes against her own stated desire and engages in self-mutilation after a confrontation with her neighbour, Tony. The confrontation concludes with Tony verbally assaulting Doreen by telling her, "Suck my cock" (64), and Doreen turns inward her desire to "tear up" Tony and bites her own arm. Having experienced the kind of punishment with which Ed threatens her, Doreen accepts the patriarchal stricture prohibiting female violence against males and she turns her anger at Tony against herself. When she breaks the prohibition against females being violent, she chooses a female rather than male victim. When Doreen and another neighbour, Mrs. Blair, engage in a battle of noise, the violence escalates to the point where Doreen "slashes MRS. BLAIR in the face with a knife" (64). For Doreen, self-censuring occurs only when the target of her anger is male. However, when Tony once again intrudes into her room, Doreen responds to his request for salad dressing with the single word 'No'. As the stage directions demonstrate, "Doreen's 'No' is quiet but it bounces TONY off the walls" (66). Doreen's act of resistance so empowers her that she, Susy, and Lil are able, using only their minds, to send objects flying across the room.

Not surprisingly, the scene entitled "The Death of Pentheus" immediately follows Doreen's scene of empowerment. Once again possessed by Agave, Doreen, in conjunction with the Bacchants, tears Pentheus to pieces. Once again engaging in strategic essentialism, Churchill and Lan demonstrate how, as Helen Birch suggests,

"the counterpointing of women and murder in fact and fiction so often marks the limits of socially acceptable feminism" (6). In her introduction to *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, Birch explains how in courtrooms and newspaper accounts throughout the Western world women who kill are divided into two camps — bad or mad:

> When . . . a woman's violence appears as a response to anger, the full weight of the law is brought to bear. But in cases where diminished responsibility, a kind of temporary madness induced by anything from PMT [premenstrual tension] to the experience of systematic abuse can be shown to account for her actions, the issue of a woman's agency, her responsibility, disappears. She killed because she was out of control. (4)

Churchill and Lan's representation of Doreen and the other women, then, would seem to re-inscribe gender stereotypes. However, upon realizing what she has done, Doreen/Agave asserts agency and accepts full responsibility for her actions: "*I* broke open his ribs. *I* tore off his head" (70) [emphasis added]. Unlike the Agave in Euripides's *The Bacchae*, who after the murder of Pentheus accepts the re-establishment of patriarchal order and submits to Cadmus' decree of exile, Doreen/Agave refuses to return to a life of patriarchal oppression in which she must deny her own agency. When Lena, Marcia, and Yvonne turn to go home, Doreen/Agave declares, "There's nothing for me there. There never was. I'm staying here," and consequently "the WOMEN turn back and stay" (70). Sadly, their act of resistance is short-lived and fails to provide satisfying closure. In Part Three, in a scene entitled "Birds," Doreen continues to work as a secretary and continues to be subjected to the weight of patriarchal authority.

Having engaged in the ultimate act of physical violence, Doreen learns that violence is futile and unsatisfying. Despite her terrible and bloody act of resistance, Doreen remains unable to prevent the strangling effects of patriarchal power. With the words of her signature line, "All I wanted was peace and quiet" (22, 58) echoing in the audience members' ears, Doreen laments: "It seems that my mouth is full of birds which I crunch between my teeth. Their feathers, their blood and broken bones are choking me" (71). The sheer weight of the forces aligned against her ensures Doreen's ultimate failure, and the play ends as it began, with Dionysos dancing. Still, the various possession experiences in *A Mouthful of Birds* provide the kinds of reeducation that lead to political engagement, the kinds of reeducation demanded of epic theatre. Churchill and Lan, using the episodic structure recommended by Brecht, immerse their audience in new ways of knowing.

In addition to episodic structure, Churchill and Lan use another Brechtian epic device, doubling, which, from a purely pragmatic perspective, makes plays with large casts economically viable. However, as mentioned in Chapter Four, centered on *Cloud Nine*, doubling also works effectively as an alienation effect and as a means of making connections between different characters, the latter consideration being especially apparent in *A Mouthful of Birds*. Suggesting like Brecht that social conditions rather than individual characteristics determine people's lived reality, Churchill replaces the individuality of characters with a multiple viewpoint. For example, in the original production, the same actor, Tricia Kelly, played several characters, including Lena and Lil. In the scene entitled "Psychic Attack," Lena is goaded into killing her baby by the Spirit, played by the same actor who played Doreen's tormentor, Tony. Throughout the

scene entitled "Hot Summer," Lil unemotionally reads aloud from a newspaper numerous accounts of gendered violence, accounts of infanticide, domestic violence, mass murder, and self-mutilation. Because many of the accounts are based on actual events, Lil's disinterested tone merely serves to accentuate the passion and the tragedy of the stories themselves.[15] Because the same actor plays Lil and Lena, the audience immediately thinks of Lena when they hear Lil read about "a Manchester woman, 22, who said she feared demons would possess her baby daughter [and who] was found not guilty of the child's murder by reason of insanity" (62). Similarly, because the actor who plays Derek/Herculine Barbin also plays the male prison officer in the scene entitled "Dancing," the audience makes connections between the hermaphrodite Herculine/Abel and the androgynous Dan. Additionally, when the audience sees Pig dancing they think of Dan because Stephen Goff played both characters in the original production. Although this particular doubling undoubtedly resulted from Goff's background as a dancer, it also serves to make explicit the sensuous pleasure some people find connected with violence. For Churchill and Lan, then, doubling becomes another effective epic technique for making intricate connections that reverberate throughout the scenes.

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[15]One account, in fact, has been used by at least one other playwright. Sarah Daniels used the following account in her play *Masterpieces* (London: Methuen, 1984) about the violent pornography of snuff films: "The Victoria line was out of action for two hours last night after a woman, 35, grabbed a stranger and pushed him in front of an approaching train. The victim, a man of 40, died instantly" (62). Additionally, another story is a factual account of the case of Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono, collectively identified as the Hillside Strangler, who between 1977 and 1979 killed over a dozen women in Los Angeles: "Police in Los Angeles are looking for a strangler who has raped and killed twelve women in recent months. Their naked bodies have been found on hillsides and in rivers. Their ages range from 13 to 51. Women have been advised not to go out alone after dark and to close all ground floor doors and windows" (62).

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Churchill and Lan use numerous epic devices, including doubling, episodic structure, non-realistic set, choreography, and collaboration, to challenge forms of dominance. Engaging in feminism of difference, they strategically use essentialism and its cognates as tools or weapons of struggle. For them, *A Mouthful of Birds* itself becomes a political act of resistance and subversion in which they simultaneously use strategic essentialism as a provisional strategy and critique the essentialist idea of inherently non-violent and peace-loving women.

CONCLUSION

If the range of theatre is to be widened this will come partly from greater technical range, from the ability to use the medium more fully.[1] (Caryl Churchill)

In her socialist feminist drama, Churchill uses the medium of Brechtian epic theatre to present both women and men as multiple, de-centered, and internally contradictory subjects constructed in the experience of historically specific versions of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Using the stage as a vehicle for social change, she demonstrates her dual allegiance to socialist and feminist principles as she unmasks hierarchical power relations and shows how these relations can sometimes be successfully contested. Techniques of Brechtian epic theatre enable her to challenge traditional ideas about what is historically significant and to interrogate the relationship between history and current social practice. In her socialist feminist epic drama she makes explicit the ways in which class-stratified societies produce a wide range of competing and often contradictory forms of consciousness and [re]produce specific forms of power relations. She offers historical explanations of repressive power and connects the personal experiences of individual women and men to the wider socio-political context of economic and gender relations. Exploring the linkages between theory and practice, she uses numerous Brechtian epic devices to shift her audiences' awareness towards a socialist feminist perception of the world.

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[1]From "Not Ordinary, Not Safe," *The Twentieth Century*, Nov. 1960, p. 448.

Because so many of her plays privilege collective resistance, Churchill frequently utilizes the epic technique of a collective working method. In all the plays discussed in this dissertation, with the exception of *Top Girls* and *A Mouthful of Birds*, she works with a theatre collective, either Joint Stock or, in the case of *Vinegar Tom*, Monstrous Regiment. Like Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment utilize collective working methods to eliminate hierarchies among the play's producers, to support and strengthen each individual, while at the same time fostering collective consciousness. Both theatre collectives provide critiques that undermine and challenge contemporary British ideology. So, while Joint Stock's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* privileges the collective revolutionary fervour of "Britain's first socialists," Monstrous Regiment's *Vinegar Tom* explores the mythology of witchcraft in terms of both the economic pressures that helped produce the persecution of women as witches and the role of women in society. Epic theatre's collective working methods, then, prove extremely useful to a socialist feminist playwright such as Churchill because they practice a non-hierarchical organization which is appropriate to her various plays, no matter what dimension[s] of hierarchy they represent.

Churchill frequently utilizes alienation effects to ensure that the audience members never lose themselves unreservedly and uncritically in the play being performed. Annie Smart's field set in a room in *Fen* or tree growing in a gutted two-storey house in *A Mouthful of Birds*, for example, works to disrupt the audience members' empathy and to increase their intellectual engagement. In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, the non-realistic set and minimal use of props and costumes combine to underline the austerity and poverty of the characters' lives. In *A Mouthful of Birds*,

Churchill and Lan use the beautifully choreographed movement pieces "Fruit Ballet" and "Extreme Happiness" as alienation effects which disrupt the narrative structure. By emphasizing the seductive pleasure associated with violence, the choreography allows Churchill and Lan to interrogate and disrupt the patriarchal binary opposition of violent men and peaceful women. In *Top Girls*, Churchill uses her visually jarring first act as an alienation effect. By presenting women from different cultures and historical time periods ranging from the ninth century to the present, Churchill demonstrates that gender concerns cannot be viewed in isolation from other factors that shape social experience, factors such as class and race. The Top Girls, dressed in the costumes of their period, serve to make visible the trans-historical, trans-cultural nature of women's oppression. Alienation effects such as these, then, enable Churchill to instruct her audience about the need for social change, to infuse in them an awareness of the futility of individual emancipation without concurrent social transformation.

Churchill uses another epic device, episodic structure or non-linear progression, not only to disrupt the continuity of the narrative, but to provide the kinds of reeducation that Brecht theorized lead to political engagement. Giving equal significance in terms of playing time on stage to a major event such as the Putney Debates and a minor event such as two women looking in a mirror, Churchill uses an episodic structure in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* to construct each scene as the site of potentially realized humanity and to demonstrate the political potential of personal transformation. In *Cloud Nine*, through her unique time shift, from Victorian Africa in the first act to London in 1979 twenty-five years later in the second act, she interrogates the ways in which gender and race norms are socially constructed at

different historical moments and in different social contexts. In *Top Girls*, Churchill uses non-linear progression — the play ends at the conclusion of Act Three, but the story ends at the conclusion of Act Two — to codify Marlene's casual dismissal of her own daughter as an extreme example of women reaching the top on the backs of other women and, thereby, to privilege collective resistance. In *A Mouthful of Birds* Churchill uses a three-part structure to help the audience members recognize and learn from the main characters' profound and often permanent change. For Churchill, an episodic structure proves extremely useful for fostering a critical attitude in her audience, for instructing them about the intersecting roles of gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and age in shaping social experience.

Unlike episodic structure, which disrupts the flow of the narrative, monologues strengthen and enrich epic theatre's narrative function. Churchill uses the epic techniques of monologues, prologues, epilogues, and introductions in order to connect individual understanding to a wider political strategy in society. In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, these techniques are used not only to introduce and prepare for scenes which follow, but to comment on the action. These narrative strategies enable Churchill to provide historical accounts of the death of Robert Lockyer or the arrival at and eviction of the Diggers from Saint George's Hill in Surrey, for example, from an openly political perspective. She challenges the audience to interpose their judgements not only on the characters but on themselves, to ask themselves how they would behave in similar circumstances. Churchill uses these epic techniques not only to give a voice to those often marginalized or ignored in traditional narratives, but to foster a pro-active disposition in her audience.

Like Brecht, Churchill also uses songs to foster an active and practical critical attitude in her audience. In *Vinegar Tom*, for example, songs enable Churchill to incorporate a materialist critique into her play. The singers, dressed in contemporary costume, help the audience to make comparisons between the historical events described in the play and contemporary history. By correlating the treatment of the women derogated as witches within the play to the typical treatment of women within patriarchy, songs such as "Nobody Sings," "If Everybody Worked as Hard as Me," and "Evil Women" explore the ideologies which have structured and conditioned women and which continue to do so. The songs also explore the intricate linking between androcentric sexuality and violence against women in society, even as they demonstrate that misogyny is a learned response which may possibly be unlearned. For Churchill, songs work as alienation effects which effect narrative delegitimation by disrupting the sequence of the narrative to give voice to the muted.

In many of her socialist feminist plays, Churchill uses doubling to make intricate connections between different contexts, thereby suggesting a continuity to women's history of oppression and resistance. Like other epic techniques, doubling disrupts the audience's empathy and causes them to reflect on what they are seeing. Doubling enables Churchill to replace the individuality of characters with a multiple viewpoint, to direct the audience's attention to the overall shape of experiences rather than to individual experiences themselves. In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, for example, Churchill innovatively assigns twenty-five roles to two female and four male actors in order to replace the individuality of the characters with a multiple viewpoint and to demonstrate that social conditions are more powerful than individual qualities in

determining women's lived reality. In *Top Girls*, the doubling of all the characters but Marlene, the symbolic representative of self-interested individualism, compels the audience to recognize that individual achievement is not always liberating to women collectively. Moreover, by doubling characters such as Nijo from the past with characters such as Win from the present, Churchill questions the extent of women's liberation over the last eleven centuries and connects sexual slavery to so-called sexual liberation that serves men's interests more than women's. Similarly, in *Fen*, Churchill uses doubling to underline connections between characters. For example, having the same actor play both an abusive step-mother and an evangelist allows Churchill to interrogate the intersecting roles of the family and the church in the social construction of individuals. In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill doubles both roles and dialogues to posit the possibility for change and for a reclamation of individual and societal power. Doubling serves her socialist feminist agenda because it enables her to interrogate the role of social class, for example, on individuals in specific historical contexts and to suggest that the establishment of an egalitarian society requires collective politicization of all classes.

Closely aligned to doubling in Churchill's work, cross-casting too works as an alienation effect that enables Churchill to expose hierarchical power relations in racist, capitalist, patriarchal societies and to question the ways in which oppressed groups repress features which are incompatible with the identity imposed by the dominant group. Like doubling, cross-casting becomes a powerful visual reminder of the way subjects become constituted and governed by the exercise of control through their bodies. In *Cloud Nine*, for example, Churchill exposes the power relations inherent in

historically specific gender and race relations by having Betty played by a man, Edward played by a woman, and the black African Joshua played by a white man. In *Vinegar Tom* the two women who play Sprenger and Kramer as music hall gents provide a graphic illustration of women's alienation from themselves and draw attention to women's unwitting complicity in their own and other women's oppression. And in *Fen*, the nameless boy of the prologue is played by a woman to remind the audience of the subordinate position of women and children throughout history and to suggest that this subordination continues today. In her socialist feminist drama, then, Churchill uses cross-casting, like many of the other epic techniques, to challenge and subvert hegemonic notions of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and age and the corresponding roles these categories produce for individuals in society.

Like Brecht, Churchill acknowledges a desire to give her audiences the opportunity to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view. She frequently uses the epic technique of gestus to instill in her audiences a recognition and acknowledgment of class and gender hierarchies. For example, in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* she uses gestus to challenge religious structures grounded in fixed hierarchies of power. The gestic communal meal of the last scene, a parody of the sacrament of Holy Eucharist, signals the possibility of a new kind of communion grounded in and benefitting humanity, even as it acknowledges the realities of the current political situation in capitalist, patriarchal England. In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill uses gestus in the form of Margery churning butter that will not come to connect sexual and economic frustration and to demonstrate how this frustration can result in the oppression of other women. Also, the gestic scene in which Jack accuses Alice of

stealing his penis demonstrates how misogynist gender ideology has become culturally coded and helps the audience members to connect the historical past to the material present. Gestus, because it allows Churchill to explore how the personal lives of individuals derive meaning from the social and political context in which they occur, represents an extremely useful tool for her strong socialist feminist politic.

Churchill continues to stage her socialist feminist message through the medium of Brechtian epic theatre. A number of her most recent plays, including *Mad Forest* (1990), *The Skriker* (1994), and *Hotel* (1997), utilize many of the epic techniques discussed in this dissertation. Epic techniques, like those used in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, *Fen*, and *A Mouthful of Birds* make it possible for Churchill to use the stage as a vehicle for social change. Her ability to use the epic medium to its fullest widens the range of theatre, and her unique application of epic devices to her socialist feminist politic makes Brechtian epic theatre a useful paradigm within which to read her work.

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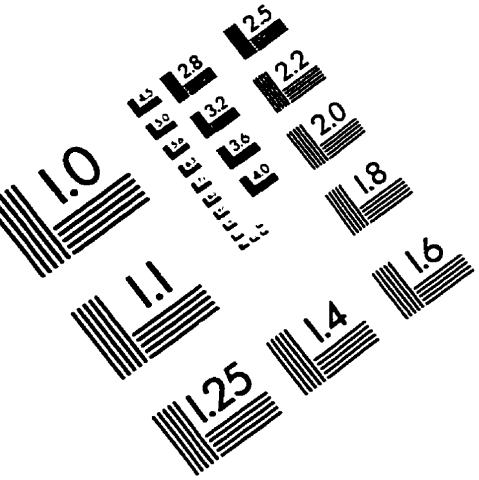

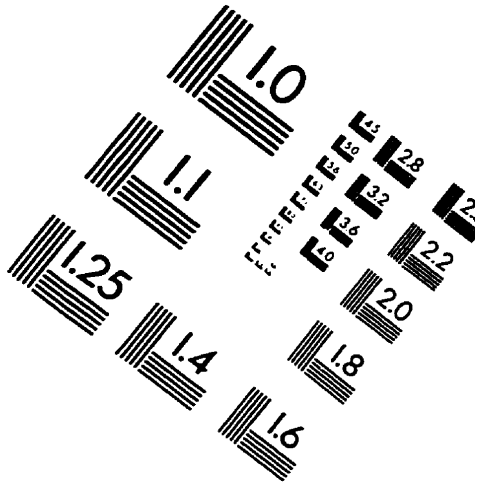

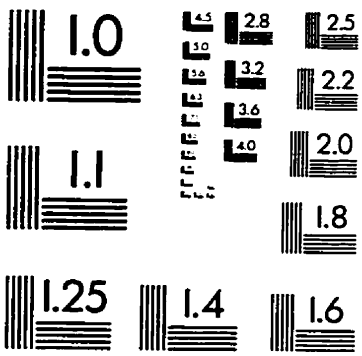

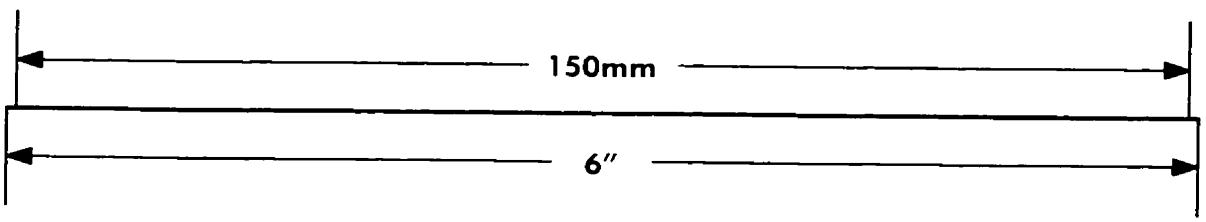

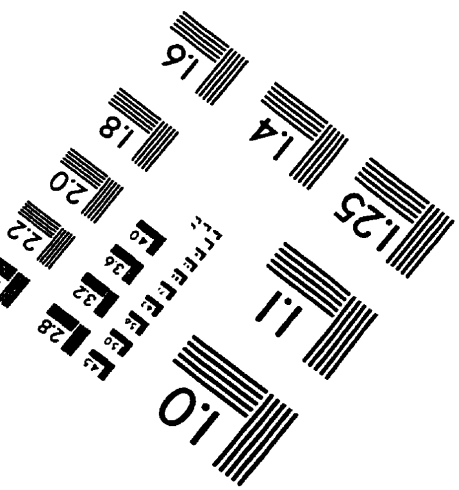

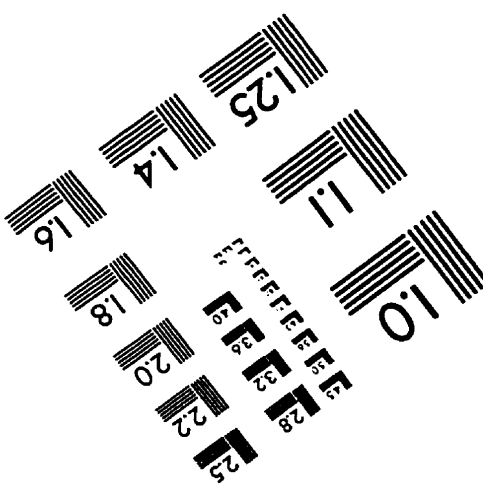

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